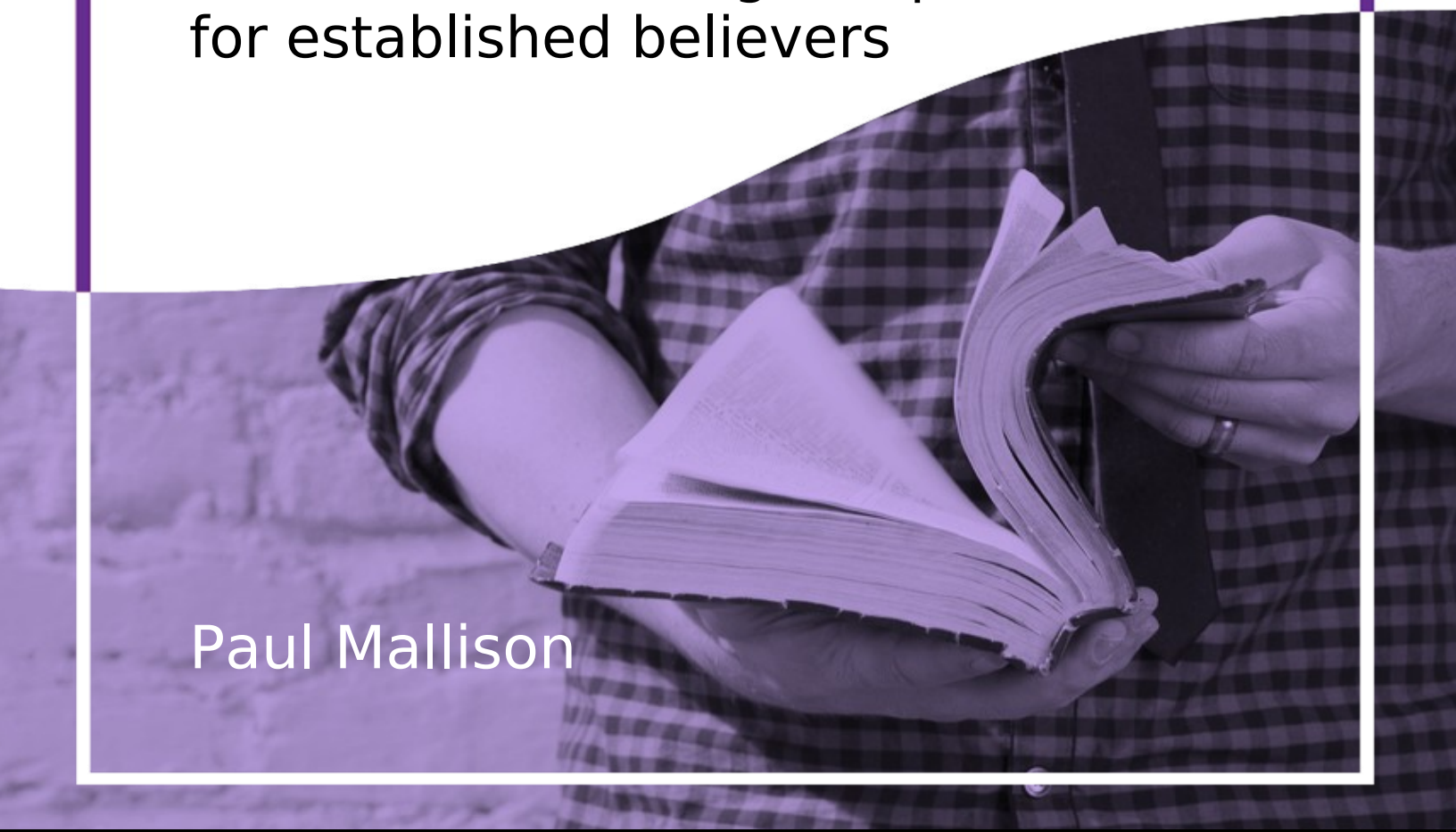
The Bible *Unpacked*

Comprehensive Edition

The Bible's teaching compiled
for established believers



Paul Mallison

With the *NET Bible* plus other translations

The Bible Unpacked™

Comprehensive Edition

The Bible's teaching compiled for established believers

Paul Mallison

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This copy was made on: 17-Sep-25.

This work is dedicated to the members of the persecuted church, faithful to Jesus Christ

Users are asked to pray regularly for persecuted Christians and, if possible, support them financially. These things can be done through organizations that provide both aid to them and prayer notices, such as those listed at: www.thebibleunpacked.net/persecuted-christians.

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Foreword

Overview

The aim of this book is to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order, using the Bible itself – i.e. verses taken from the Bible.

Each chapter is divided into two parts. Both of these parts contain major headings, which in turn contain groups of subheadings. The subheadings give key Bible teachings. They are each followed by a related verse/s. The parts of the verses that the subheadings reflect are in *italics*. Occasionally a heading or a verse is followed by a comment.

The Selection of Verses

All the editions in this series (see *The Seven Editions of The Bible Unpacked*, later in this *Foreword*) are essentially abbreviated versions of the *In-Depth Edition*. In that edition each subheading was derived from the common theme of the verses following it. As such the subheadings are based on groups of verses with a common theme, rather than the verses being selected to support the subheadings. In the shorter editions the verses (often only one or two) have been selected from the original groups of verses under the corresponding subheadings in the *In-Depth Edition*.

Contemplating Verses

Much care has been taken to interpret the verses both in the context of the passage that they are from and in the light of Scripture as a whole. Nevertheless, if you have doubts about the usage of a verse then:

- read the section in the Bible from which it is taken, and consider how it is used in its context.
- consider how the verse fits in with Scripture as a whole. (For example, interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching.)
- read commentaries on the verse and its passage.

Symbols

⇧ ⇩ occur in cross references and some comments. These indicate that the verse or passage in question has been included in the previous subsection (⇧) or the following subsection (⇩).

▯ ▯ occur occasionally in comments. These indicate that the verse or passage in question has been included above (▯) or below (▯) in the same subsection.

Occasionally ". . ." appears at the end of a heading and at the beginning of the following heading. This is to indicate that the teaching in the second heading follows on closely from that of the first one.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations for books of the Bible are standard ones.

"OT" is used for "Old Testament" and "NT" for "New Testament".

Abbreviations denoting Bible translations are identified on the copyright notices page, at the beginning of this book.

Endorsements

Note that a number of the following endorsements are for *The Bible Unpacked* series in general or for editions other than this one.

The author has done a great job in collecting and arranging texts under doctrinal and practical headings.

Dr Paul Barnett, Bishop and noted author

I highly recommend The Bible Unpacked for its use both in evangelism and helping people grow in their Christian faith.

Dr Peter Ralphs, Former Principal of Bible College of Queensland

Paul Mallison has compiled an excellent resource for the seeker through to mature Christians.

Glyn Henman, CEO of Young Life Australia

I am a big fan of the Intermediate level one. I carry it everywhere with me.

Gary Irvine, YWAM Leader

About the Author

Paul Mallison has a BA Dip Ed from Macquarie University, Sydney. He has spent most of his working life teaching students from a cross section of ages and backgrounds. In his work he has composed numerous teaching materials. Paul is a son of best-selling Australian author and international educator, the late Rev. Dr John Mallison. He is credited with extensive work on the final draft of the last two of his father's 20 published books.

He considers the theology of his *The Bible Unpacked* material to be "evangelical". As for a statement of faith, he adheres to the Apostle's Creed. Paul lives in Sydney, Australia.

Navigating This File

General

In this file almost all instances of colored text are hyperlinks.

If using *Adobe Reader*, to ensure that the target of a hyperlink will always be displayed at the top of the screen, from the View menu select Page Display and then Enable Scrolling –or Two Page Scrolling. Note that this file may not display correctly if it is opened in *Preview*, an Apple program. On an Apple device, use *Apple Books* (formerly *iBooks*) instead.

After clicking a hyperlink, to return to it, use Alt + ← (i.e. hold down the Alt key and press the left arrow key). On an Apple computer use Command + ←. If the focus has since moved to another page in the meantime, you will need to do this more than once.

Quick Navigation Page

The *Quick Navigation Page* is located at the end of the file. It has hyperlinks to:

- each of the book's 8 units and all the chapters;
- each of the 8 units' listings in *Major Headings*;
- each chapter's listing in *All Headings*;
- each book of the Bible in the *Scripture Index*;
- each letter in the *Subject Index*; and
- the main headings in the introduction and reference sections.

The bottom of most pages have hyperlinks to the main sections of the *Quick Navigation Page*, as per the following:

A – B – C – D – E – F – G – H – OT – NT – Subj

Hyperlinks in Contents

In addition to the Contents near the start, there is a contents at the beginning of both each chapter and each group of chapters (i.e. the eight units). Each heading listed in a contents is a hyperlink to the heading.

Hyperlinks to biblia.com – to Check Context

With internet access, click a verse's reference to see the verse in its chapter at biblia.com, in the *NET Bible*. This allows users to check the context of a verse.

If you get a security warning asking whether you trust the website, ensure Remember this action for this site for all PDF documents is checked and then click Allow.

Hyperlinks in Headers and Footers

Each chapter is divided into two halves or parts. The headers in the main text have the name of the chapter and the name of the chapter part on alternate pages. The chapter names are hyperlinks to the corresponding chapter names in the *Major Headings* list. And the chapter part names are hyperlinks to the corresponding names in the *All Headings* list.

At the start of footers in the main text is an arrow (). This links to the start of the second column on the page, to allow mobile users to easily move there.

The footers also have hyperlinks to the main sections of the *Quick Navigation Page* (as referred to above).

Hyperlinked Indexes

There is both a *Scripture Index* and a *Subject Index*. Each of these contains hyperlinks to the verses and topics listed.

Hyperlinked Headings and Lists of Headings

There are two lists of the headings in the main text – *Major Headings* and *All Headings*. The first contains the major headings in each chapter and the second contains all headings including every subheading. All the headings in these lists are hyperlinks to the corresponding headings in the text.

Conversely, all the headings in the text are also hyperlinks to the corresponding headings in the *All Headings* list. This allows users to quickly view the headings within a chapter, enabling them to see what headings lay ahead or to see the context of a heading that they have arrived at by clicking on a cross-reference hyperlink.

Additionally, there are also links between key corresponding headings in the *Major Headings* and *All Headings* lists – indicated by upward / downward pointing triangles (△, ▽).

Bookmarks

Depending on the readers device, this file should open with a bookmark pane. If using *Adobe Reader* on a computer, it can be displayed by pressing **F4** or selecting from the View menu: Show/Hide > Navigation Panes > Bookmarks.

Clicking on a bookmark will navigate to and display the corresponding heading in the document.

Adobe Reader View Options

Bear in mind the options available through the Adobe Reader View menu's Zoom submenu, notably

the options: Actual Size (Ctrl + 1), Fit Width (Ctrl + 2) and Fit Width (Ctrl + 3). These can also be added to the toolbar by selecting from the View menu: Show/Hide, Toolbar Items, Show Select & Zoom Tools and then clicking the appropriate option.

By using shortcut keys or the submenus under Show/Hide, the user can get extra space for viewing the document by hiding objects on the Adobe Reader screen. The user can hide (and later show) the Menu Bar (F9), Toolbars (F8) and/or the Navigation Pane (F4).

SECTION I.

What to Know

Unit A

God and Spiritual Powers

1. God’s Being.....5
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CHAPTER 1

God’s Being

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I. Basics

The concepts in the first half of this chapter are fundamental to understanding what God is like, as they concern basic attributes of his being. These include attributes which show God to be very different to us, but also attributes which indicate that he is like us in that he is a personal being.

a) God's Form

God is one

Mark 12:29b, 32 [Jesus, quoting Moses:] Listen, Israel, *the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* ... [32]The expert in the law said to him, "*That is true, Teacher; you are right to say that he is one*, and there is no one else besides him. NET

In teaching that God is one, the Bible indicates that God is a single entity or being.

God is spirit

John 4:24 *God is spirit,* and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. NET

God's nature is spirit; he is a spiritual being. So God is not a physical being, in contrast to people and particularly to idols.

God cannot be seen by people

1Tim 6:16 [Paul, speaking of God:] He alone has endless life and lives in inaccessible light. *No one has ever seen him, nor can anyone see him.* Honor and eternal power belong to him! Amen. ISV

God is everywhere, not just in temples

Jer 23:23–24 *"I am a God who is near," says the Lord. "I am also a God who is far away." [24]"No one can hide where I cannot see him," says the Lord. "I fill all of heaven and earth," says the Lord.* NCV™

1Ki 8:27 [Solomon, praying at the dedication of the temple:] But *will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!* NKJV

A vision of God

Ezek 1:26–28a [Ezekiel, describing a vision of God:] I then saw what looked like a throne made of sapphire, and sitting on the throne was a figure in the shape of a human. [27]From the waist up, it was glowing like metal in a hot furnace, and from the waist down it looked like the flames of a fire. *The figure was surrounded by a bright light, [28]as colorful as a rainbow that appears after a storm. I realized I was seeing the brightness of the Lord's glory!* CEV

Note: God primarily dwells in heaven

Deut 26:15a [Moses, to God:] Look down from *your holy dwelling place in heaven* and bless your people ... NET

Verses which speak of God being in heaven are not understood to indicate that he is in any way confined to one location. But they do suggest that his form is such that his primary presence is in heaven. Note that some verses imply that God is present throughout the earth through his Holy Spirit (cf. Ps 139:7–10).

b) God's Glory

Scripture often speaks of God's glory in reference to his wondrous being. In doing so, it has in view God's essence and/or his attributes. Regarding his essence, God's glory pertains to his essential being itself, such that his presence is on occasions perceived as his glory and spoken of in terms of it. Regarding his attributes, God's glory emanates in part from his attributes – such as his power – which in a sense reflect the glory of God's essence and presence.

Glory is a prominent and key attribute of God

Ps 138:5 They [kings] will sing about the ways of the Lord, for *great is the glory of the Lord!* ISV

Rom 3:23 *All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.* CEV

In their sinful state, people are not compatible with God's wondrous glory. The fact that it is God's glory that people are measured by or compared to, underlines that glory is a key attribute of God.

God's glory is an integral aspect of God's presence

Ps 26:8 [David, to God:] I love *the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells*. GNT

Here David speaks of God's temple as being a prime location of God's presence and thus his glory. As such, David associates God's glory with his presence.

God's glory manifests his presence

Lev 9:23–24 Moses and Aaron then entered into the Meeting Tent. When they came out, they blessed the people, and *the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.* 24*Then fire went out from the presence of the Lord* and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar, and all the people saw it, so they shouted loudly and fell down with their faces to the ground. NET

Acts 7:55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently toward heaven and *saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God*. NET

Leviticus 9:23–24 (above) correlates "the glory of the Lord" (v. 23) with "the presence of the Lord" (v. 24). Acts 7:55 (immediately above) correlates "the glory of God" with "God" himself – and so likewise with God's presence.

God is surrounded by brilliant light

1Tim 6:16a [Paul, speaking of God:] *He alone possesses immortality and lives in unapproachable light*, whom no human has ever seen or is able to see. NET

God has great majesty

Ps 145:5a [David, to God:] I will meditate on *the glorious splendor of Your majesty* … NKJV

God's glory is reflected in his powerful deeds

John 11:40–44 Jesus responded [to Martha], "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, *you would see the glory of God*?" 41So they took away the stone. *Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you that you have listened to me.* 42I knew that you always listen to me, but I said this for the sake of the crowd standing around here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43*When he had said this, he shouted in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* 44*The one who had died came out*, his feet and hands tied up with strips of cloth, and a cloth wrapped around his face. Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go." NET

God's glory was seen (v. 40) or reflected in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, with Jesus effectively calling on God and his power (v. 41) in raising Lazarus.

God's glory is evidenced throughout the earth and the heavens

Ps 8:1 *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.* ESV

Ps 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky displays his handiwork.* NET

The above verses speak of how God's glory is evidenced throughout the earth and the heavens. For God so wonderfully created them, reflecting his glory.

God's glory will be explicitly revealed throughout the earth, to all nations

Hab 2:14 For *the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*. ESV

The revelation of God's glory in the destruction of Babylon (cf. vv. 12–13) may initially be in view, but the verse probably also has a final fulfillment at the end of the age.

c) God's Personhood

God is not a "thing" but a personal being that one can interrelate with. God thinks, has a will, has feelings and has character. Furthermore, God is active, communicates and interacts with people.

God has a mind – knowing and comprehending things

1Sam 2:3b For *the Lord is a God who knows; he evaluates what people do*. NET

1Chr 28:9a [DAVID:] And you, Solomon my son, obey the God of your father and serve him with a submissive attitude and a willing spirit, for *the LORD examines all minds and understands every motive of one's thoughts*. NET

God has a will

Eph 1:11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] In the Messiah we were also chosen when we were predestined according to *the purpose of the one* [God] *who does everything according to the intention of his will*, ... ISV

God has feelings and character . . .

2Chr 36:15 But *the LORD God felt sorry for his people*, and instead of destroying the temple, he sent prophets who warned the people over and over about their sins. CEV

James 5:11b You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that *the Lord is full of compassion and mercy*. NET

. . . God feels emotional pain

Isa 63:9a *Through all that they suffered, he suffered too.* NET

God suffered in response to the suffering of his people.

God is active

John 5:17 But Jesus said to them, "*My Father never stops working*, and so I keep working, too." NCV™

God communicates . . .

Phil 3:15 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS:] All of us who are mature should think in this same way. And if any of you think differently, *God will make it clear to you*. CEV

Heb 1:1–2 After *God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets,* [2]*in these last days he has spoken to us in a son,* whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he created the world. NET

. . . and people can communicate with God

Dan 6:10b–11 Three times each day *Daniel would kneel down to pray and thank God*, just as he always had done. [11]Then those men went as a group and *found Daniel praying and asking God for help*. NCV™

God interacts with people, responding to their requests and needs

James 4:8, 10 *Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.* Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure, you double-minded. ... [10]*Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.* NET

Ps 91:15 [GOD, SPEAKING OF A PERSON DEVOTED TO HIM:] *When he calls out to me, I will answer him. I will be with him when he is in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him honor.* NET

d) God's Eternity

God is alive

2Sam 22:47 *The LORD is alive!* My protector is praiseworthy! The God who delivers me is exalted as king! NET

God has always been alive, the first of all things . . .

Ps 93:2 *Your throne, O LORD, has been firm from the beginning, and* you existed before time began. GNT

Isa 44:6 This is what the LORD, Israel's king, says, their protector, the LORD who commands armies: "*I am the first* and I am the last, there is no God but me. NET

. . . God existed even before the world began

Ps 90:2 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Even before the mountains came into existence, or you brought the world into being, you were the eternal God.* NET

God will live forever

Dan 4:34b [King Nebuchadnezzar:] I extolled the Most High, and *I praised and glorified the one who lives forever. For his authority is an everlasting authority, and his kingdom extends from one generation to the next.* NET

1Tim 1:17 [Paul, speaking of God:] Now to *the eternal king, immortal,* invisible, the only God, *be honor and glory forever and ever!* Amen. NET

God transcends time

2Pet 3:8 [Peter, to believers:] Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that *a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day*. NET

> God dwells outside of the limitations of time, not bound by its finite perspective. From his eternal perspective, diverse periods such as a day and a thousand years are both small, even insignificant. To God the distinction between them is merely relative.

God is self-existing

John 5:26 For as *the Father has life in himself,* so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ESV

God does not change

James 1:17 All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from *the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change*. NET

> Note that “the Father of lights” refers to God as the creator of the lights in the sky, i.e. the sun, moon, and stars (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT).

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God's Pre-Eminence

See also:

▪ *a) Holiness* [God's], p. 16

A failure of many of us in the church today is that we have an inadequate view of God, failing to fully appreciate his pre-eminence. All Christians need to understand and be mindful of God's surpassing greatness and incomparable capabilities – notably his power, knowledge and wisdom.

a) God's Greatness

God is great and awesome

Deut 10:17 [Moses, to the Israelites:] For *the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God* who is unbiased and takes no bribe ... NET

God is greater than all others

John 10:29 [Jesus:] *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all*, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. NET

Ps 150:2 [A psalmist, speaking of God:] Praise him for his mighty acts! *Praise him for his surpassing greatness!* NET

God is exalted above all others

Ps 113:4 *The Lord is exalted over all the nations*; his splendor reaches beyond the sky. NET

There is no one like God . . .

Jer 10:6–7 [Jeremiah:] I said, "*There is no one like you, Lord. You are great. And you are renowned for your power.* [7]Everyone should revere you, O King of all nations, because you deserve to be revered. *For there is no one like you among any of the wise people of the nations nor among any of their kings.* NET

. . . God does things which show that there is no one like him

Isa 40:22–26 *God is the one who rules the whole earth*, and we that live here are merely insects. *He spread out the heavens like a curtain or an open tent.* [23]*God brings down rulers and turns them into nothing.* [24]*They are like flowers freshly sprung up and starting to grow. But when God blows on them, they wilt and are carried off like straw in a storm.* [25]*The holy God asks, "Who compares with me? Is anyone my equal?"* [26]*Look at the evening sky! Who created the stars? Who gave them each a name? Who leads them like an army? The Lord is so powerful that none of the stars are ever missing.* CEV

God is in fact beyond our comprehension

Job 36:26 *Yes, God is great – beyond our knowledge! The number of his years is unsearchable.* NET

Job 11:7–9 *Can you discover the essence of God? Can you find out the perfection of the Almighty?* [8]*It is higher than the heavens – what can you do? It is deeper than Sheol – what can you know?* [9]*Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.* NET

The extent of God's being and attributes are far beyond our understanding.

b) God's Power (I): Ultimate Power

God is mighty in power . . .

Ps 106:8 Yet he [God] saved them for his name's sake, *that he might make known his mighty power.* ESV

Eph 3:20 [Paul, to believers:] Glory belongs to God, whose power is at work in us. *By this power he can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.* GW

. . . God is Almighty

Rev 15:3b "Great and amazing are your deeds, *O Lord God the Almighty!* Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ESV

The words translated as "Almighty" are understood by many to convey God's all-surpassing, infinite power (or omnipotence) and his sovereignty.

God can do all things – nothing is too hard

Job 42:2 [Job, to God:] I know that *you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted*. ESV

Luke 1:36–37 [The angel Gabriel, to Mary:] Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. [37]*Nothing is impossible for God!* CEV

God does whatever pleases him

Ps 135:6 *He does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the ocean depths.* NET

God's power is far superior to that of anyone else . . .

2Chr 20:6 He [Jehoshaphat] prayed: "O Lord God of our ancestors, you are the God who lives in heaven and *rules over all the kingdoms of the nations. You possess strength and power; no one can stand against you*. NET

Eph 1:18b–19 [Paul, to believers:] ... that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19]*the incomparable greatness of his power* toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength. NET

. . . No being can do what God can do

Ps 86:8 [David:] No god is like you, O Lord. *No one can do what you do.* GW

Power in fact belongs to God

Rev 19:1 [John, describing a vision:] After these things I heard what sounded like the loud voice of a large crowd in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and *power belong to our God*. ISV

> Verses which speak of power as belonging to God, point to him as having ultimate power and being all-powerful – and even as being the ultimate source of all power.

c) God's Power (II): His Deeds

God's great power is shown in his deeds

Ps 77:14 [A psalmist, to God:] *You alone work miracles, and you have let nations see your mighty power.* CEV

God performs great and awesome deeds

Joel 2:21 Do not fear, my land! Rejoice and be glad, because *the Lord has accomplished great things!* NET

Isa 64:3 [Isaiah, to God:] When *you performed awesome deeds that took us by surprise*, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. NET

God's deeds are largely incomprehensible

Job 37:5, 15 God thunders with his voice in marvelous ways; *he does great things beyond our understanding.* ... [15]*Do you know how God commands them* [clouds], *how he makes lightning flash in his storm cloud?* NET

Eccl 8:17 [A wise teacher:] ... then *I discerned all that God has done: No one really comprehends what happens on earth. Despite all human efforts to discover it, no one can ever grasp it. Even if a wise person claimed that he understood, he would not really comprehend it.* NET

> The phrase "what happens on earth" alludes to the earlier phrase "all that God has done". No one really comprehends all this, that God does.

God's deeds are uncountable

Job 5:9 [Eliphaz, speaking of God:] *He does great and unsearchable things, marvelous things without number*; ... NET

God is glorified in his powerful deeds

Ps 86:9–10 *All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.* [10]*For you are great and do wondrous things*; you alone are God. ESV

> God is glorified through his powerful deeds partly in that people glorify him (v. 9), in response to his deeds.

d) God's Knowledge and Wisdom

God knows everything

1Jn 3:20b God is greater than our conscience and *knows all things*. NET

Job 37:16 [Elihu, to Job:] Do you know about the balancing of the clouds, that wondrous activity of *him who is perfect in knowledge*? NET

God sees all people, seeing and knowing all that they do . . .

Ps 33:13–15 The Lord watches from heaven; *he sees all people*. 14From the place where he lives *he looks carefully at all the earth's inhabitants*. 15He is the one who forms every human heart, *and takes note of all their actions*. NET

Ps 139:2–3 [David, to God:] *You know when I sit down and when I get up; even from far away you understand my motives.* 3*You carefully observe me when I travel or when I lie down to rest; you are aware of everything I do.* NET

. . . No one can hide themselves or what they do from God

Job 34:21–22 *God's eyes are on a person's ways. He sees all his steps.* 22*There's no darkness or deep shadow where troublemakers can hide.* GW

God knows all people's "hearts" and minds

Ps 44:21 God would have known, because *he knows what is in our hearts*. NCV™

Ezek 11:5b This is what the Lord says: *'This is what you are thinking, O house of Israel; I know what goes through your minds*. NET

God knows the future

Isa 46:10 [God, to Israel:] *From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened*, saying, "My plan will stand, and I'll do everything I intended to do." GW

God has incredible wisdom

Ps 147:5 Our Lord is great and has awesome power; *there is no limit to his wisdom*. NET

God's knowledge and wisdom is far superior to that of people – beyond our comprehension . . .

Isa 40:13–14, 28b *Who has known the mind of the Lord or been able to give him advice?* 14*Whom did he ask for help? Who taught him the right way? Who taught him knowledge and showed him the way to understanding? ...* 28*... No one can understand how great his wisdom is.* NCV™

. . . God knows much that people do not know

Deut 29:29a [Moses, to the Israelites:] *There are some things the Lord our God has kept secret*, but there are some things he has let us know. NCV™

1Ki 8:39b [Solomon, to God:] *Only you know what is in everyone's heart.* NCV™

Note: God can take away worldly wisdom

1Cor 1:19b [God:] *"I will cause the wise men to lose their wisdom; I will make the wise men unable to understand."* NCV™

e) Addendum: God's 'Name'

In biblical times, a person's name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and even their purpose or significance. This is highlighted by references to the "name" of the person.

Thus when used in regard to such things as God's interaction with his people, references to God's "name" are understood as being synonymous with God himself. For example, God's "name" is used in expressing God's presence amongst his people and also his care of them. Furthermore, God's people are said to do such things as trust in, fear, love and praise his "name".

God's "name" is synonymous with God himself

Isa 48:9a, 11a [God:] *For My name's sake* I will defer My anger, ... 11*For My own sake, for My own sake*, I will do it ... NKJV

Here and in the following verse, God's "name" is shown to be synonymous with God himself by the

same or similar things being done in regard to God and also to his "name".

Ps 18:49 [DAVID:] For this I will *praise you, O LORD*, among the nations, and *sing to your name*. ESV

God's "name" is synonymous with his presence

1Ki 9:3 And the LORD said to him [Solomon], "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by *putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time*. ESV

Note that the "house" refers to the temple that Solomon had built for God.

God's "name" is synonymous with God in him helping his people

Ps 20:1 May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! *May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!* ESV

God's "name" is synonymous with God in people relating to him

Ps 116:13 [A PSALMIST:] I will celebrate my deliverance, and *call on the name of the LORD*. NET

God's "name" is correlated with his authority and power

Dan 9:6 [DANIEL, TO GOD:] We have not listened to *your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name* to our kings, our rulers, our ancestors, and our whole nation. GNT

John 10:25b [JESUS:] *The deeds I do in my Father's name* testify about me. NET

Jesus performed his miracles in the "name" of his Father – i.e. by the "authority" (CEV, GNT) or "power" (AMP) of God.

God's "name" is holy

Luke 1:49 [MARY:] God All-Powerful has done great things for me, and *his name is holy*. CEV

God's "name" is great

Ps 99:3a [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Let them praise *your great and awesome name!* NET

God's "name" is glorious and exalted

Neh 9:5b May you be blessed, O LORD our God, from age to age. *May your glorious name be blessed; may it be lifted up above all blessing and praise.* NET

Note: God declared his actual name to be the "Lord"

Ex 34:5 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with Moses, and *the LORD called out his name: the LORD*. NCV™

Ex 3:13–15 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and *they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"* 14 *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* 15 *God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD*, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, *has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.* ESV

"LORD" (v. 15) can be derived from "I AM" (v. 14). For the actual Hebrew that is rendered as "LORD" is "YHWH" (most likely pronounced "Yahweh") and it "is derived from the verb *HAYAH*, *to be*" (NASB text note) to which "I AM" is also related. Note that "I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14) may well have the sense: "I will be who I will be" (cf. NIV text note). This title and its shortened form "I AM" (v. 14) appear to express God's unchanging nature, self-existence, self-determination and omnipresence.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 2

God’s Character

I

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I. Holy Characteristics

A good understanding of God requires a balanced understanding of his character, including the fundamental attribute of holiness. To obtain such an understanding, we must "take to heart" all aspects of his character. As well as the many characteristics that we find consoling, we also need to appreciate those that inspire godly fear.

a) Holiness

God's holiness involves his moral purity. It concerns God's separateness from and his intolerance of that which is morally impure. Holiness is basic to the other characteristics that follow in the first half of this chapter.

God is holy

Isa 6:3 And one [angelic being] called to another and said: "*Holy, holy, holy is the* LORD *of hosts*; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ESV

There is nothing bad in God – and he cannot tolerate evil

Ps 92:15b ... the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and *there is no unrighteousness in him*. ESV

Hab 1:13a [HABAKKUK, TO GOD:] *You are too just to tolerate evil; you are unable to condone wrongdoing*. NET

There is no one holy like God

1Sam 2:2 *No one is holy like the* LORD*!* There is no one other than you! There is no rock like our God! NET

God shows himself to be holy by what he does

Isa 5:16 The LORD All-Powerful will receive glory by judging fairly; *the holy God will show himself holy by doing what is right*. NCV™

Places where God dwells are also holy . . .

2Chr 30:27 The priests and Levites [of Israel] got up and pronounced blessings on the people. The LORD responded favorably to them as their prayers reached *his holy dwelling place in heaven*. NET

Ps 65:4b [DAVID, TO GOD:] We are filled with good things in *your house, your holy Temple*. NCV™

Places must be holy for God in his holiness to dwell in them. God is primarily spoken of as dwelling in: heaven (cf. 2Chr 30:27); places containing the Ark of the Covenant, i.e. the tabernacle and then the temple (cf. Ps 65:4); and his people.

. . . and God only dwells with those who are holy

Ezek 37:27–28 [GOD:] *The place where I live will be with them.* I will be their God, and they will be my people. [28]*When my Temple is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the* LORD*, make Israel holy.* NCV™

This passage demonstrates that those who God dwells with are holy and it can be inferred from it that he only dwells with those who are holy.

Things of God are likewise holy

Isa 52:10a The LORD will show *his holy power* to all the nations. NCV™

Jer 23:9b And because of *His holy words*. NKJV

Note: God and his ways are perfect

Matt 5:48 So then, be perfect, as *your heavenly Father is perfect*. NET

Ps 18:30a *God's way is perfect!* GW

b) Righteousness and Justice

God is righteous and just

Isa 5:16 But *the* LORD *of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness*. ESV

God's righteousness and justice are great – and everlasting

Ps 36:6a [David, to God:] *Your righteousness is towering like the mountains; your justice is like the depths of the sea.* GNT

Ps 111:3 [A psalmist, speaking of God:] Splendid and glorious are his awesome deeds, and *his righteousness endures forever*. ISV

God's ways are right and just

Hos 14:9 Who is wise? Let him discern these things! Who is discerning? Let him understand them! For *the ways of the Lord are right*; the godly walk in them, but in them the rebellious stumble. NET

Rev 15:3b [Believers in heaven, to God:] *Just and true are your ways*, King over the nations! NET

All God does is right and just . . .

Dan 4:37a Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for *all his deeds are right and his ways are just*. NET

. . . God does no wrong

Zeph 3:5a But the Lord is good, and he is there in that city [Jerusalem]. *He does no wrong.* Every morning he governs the people fairly; every day he can be trusted. NCV™

God is truthful

Isa 45:19b [God:] *I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right.* ESV

God does not show favoritism

Rom 2:11 For *there is no partiality with God*. NET

Note: God loves righteousness and justice

Ps 33:5 *He loves righteousness and justice*; the world is filled with the gracious love of the Lord. ISV

c) Faithfulness

God is faithful

Deut 7:9 [Moses, to Israel:] Remember that the Lord your God is the only God and that *he is faithful. He will keep his covenant and show his constant love to a thousand generations* of those who love him and obey his commands … GNT

Heb 10:23 [The writer, to believers:] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for *he who promised is faithful*. ESV

God's faithfulness is great

Lam 3:22–23 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; [23]they are new every morning; *great is your faithfulness*. ESV

God's faithfulness lasts forever

Ps 117:2 For great is his steadfast love toward us, and *the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever*. Praise the Lord! ESV

God never abandons nor fails

Ps 9:10 [David, to God:] Your loyal followers trust in you, for *you, Lord, do not abandon those who seek your help*. NET

1Chr 28:20 David also said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and brave, and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged, because the Lord God, my God, is with you. *He will not fail you or leave you* until all the work for the Temple of the Lord is finished. NCV™

God does not lie nor change his mind – he keeps his promises

Num 23:19 *God is no mere human! He doesn't tell lies or change his mind. God always keeps his promises.* CEV

d) Anger

Although we usually view anger in a negative light, this is not how the Bible depicts God's anger, or wrath. God's anger is always justified and righteous, consistent with his holiness. Moreover, it arises in response to that which is contrary to his holiness. Unlike human anger, God's anger is never uncontrolled, wayward or spasmodic – and is tempered by his mercy, notably where his own people are concerned.

God's anger and its consequences are awesome . . .

Ps 90:11 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Who can really fathom the intensity of your anger? Your raging fury causes people to fear you.* NET

Isa 5:25 Therefore [due to their evil] *the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.* ESV

. . . This will be evident upon all nations and the whole earth

Isa 13:9 The day of the LORD is coming—*that cruel day of his fierce anger and fury. The earth will be made a wilderness, and every sinner will be destroyed.* GNT

Zeph 3:8 Therefore you must wait patiently for me," says the LORD, "for the day when I attack and take plunder. *I have decided to gather nations together and assemble kingdoms, so I can pour out my fury on them – all my raging anger. For the whole earth will be consumed by my fiery anger.* NET

God's anger cannot be quenched

Jer 21:12 Family of David, this is what the LORD says: You must judge people fairly every morning. Save the person who has been robbed from the power of his attacker. If you don't, I will become very angry. *My anger will be like a fire that no one can put out*, because you have done evil things. NCV™

God's anger cannot be withstood

Nah 1:6 *No one can withstand his indignation! No one can resist his fierce anger!* His wrath is poured out like volcanic fire, boulders are broken up as he approaches. NET

God is slow to anger and often holds it back

Num 14:18a *The LORD is slow to anger* and abounding in loyal love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty … NET

Ps 78:38 Yet he is compassionate. He forgives sin and does not destroy. *He often holds back his anger, and does not stir up his fury.* NET

God does not stay angry

Mic 7:18b *He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.* NKJV

God's anger arises in response to sin and disobedience

1Ki 16:2b [GOD, TO BAASHA THE KING OF ISRAEL:] Yet you followed in Jeroboam's footsteps and encouraged my people Israel to sin; *their sins have made me angry.* NET

Mic 5:15 [GOD:] *I will angrily seek vengeance on the nations that do not obey me.* NET

God's anger arises in response to people turning away from him

Ezra 8:22b "The good hand of our God is on everyone who is seeking him, but *his great anger is against everyone who forsakes him*." NET

Other things that arouse God's anger

Ps 78:21–22 When the LORD heard this [complaints, expressing doubts], he was furious. A fire broke out against Jacob, and *his anger flared up against Israel, [22]because they did not have faith in God, and did not trust his ability to deliver them.* NET

Rom 2:7b–8 But *he* [God] *will bring [8]anger and fury on those who, in selfish pride, refuse to believe the truth and who follow what is wrong.* GW

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Loving Characteristics

God's love is one of the two primary characteristics from which his other personal characteristics emanate, the other primary one being his holiness. Comprehending and persistently being mindful of God's love and his associated characteristics provides great encouragement for believers.

a) Love

See also:

- *c) God Loves His People*, p. 180

God is love – as epitomized in him giving his only Son, to save us

1Jn 4:8–10, 16 The person who does not love does not know God, because *God is love.* [9]*This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent his unique Son into the world so that we might live through him.* [10]*This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* … [16]We have come to know and rely on the love that God has for us. *God is love, and the person who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* ISV

The phrase "God is love" (vv. 8, 16) implies that God's nature is fundamentally love, rather than that love is simply a characteristic of God. It is also indicative of God being the sole source of love; love does not exist apart from him. This assertion is also reflected in v. 7 and v. 16b.

God's love is great

Ex 34:6–7a The LORD passed in front of Moses and said, "I am the LORD. The LORD is a God who shows mercy, who is kind, who doesn't become angry quickly, *who has great love* and faithfulness [7]and is kind to thousands of people. NCV™

Ps 108:4 [DAVID, TO GOD:] For *your loyal love extends beyond the sky,* and your faithfulness reaches the clouds. NET

God's love is steadfast

Ps 36:7a *How precious is your steadfast love, O God!* ESV

God's love lasts forever

Ps 89:2 [ETHAN, TO GOD:] I know that *your love will last for all time,* that your faithfulness is as permanent as the sky. GNT

Ps 100:5 For the LORD is good; *his steadfast love endures forever,* and his faithfulness to all generations. ESV

b) Mercy

God is merciful

Deut 4:31 [MOSES, TO ISRAEL:] *The LORD your God is a merciful God.* He will not abandon you, destroy you, or forget the promise to your ancestors that he swore he would keep. GW

God's mercy is great

Ps 25:6 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Because of *your great mercy,* I come to your house, LORD, and I am filled with wonder as I bow down to worship at your holy temple. CEV

Along with being merciful, God is gracious

Ex 34:6b *The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious,* slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, … ESV

God is compassionate

James 5:11b You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that *the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.* NET

Due to his mercy and compassion: God is long-suffering; . . .

Neh 9:28–31 [LEVITES, PRAYING TO GOD AND MAKING REFERENCE TO THEIR FOREFATHERS:] Then, when they were at rest again, they went back to doing evil before you. Then you abandoned them to their enemies, and they gained dominion over them. *When they again cried out to you, in your*

compassion you heard from heaven and rescued them time and again. [29]And you solemnly admonished them in order to return them to your law, but they behaved presumptuously and did not obey your commandments. They sinned against your ordinances – those by which an individual, if he obeys them, will live. They boldly turned from you; they rebelled and did not obey. [30]*You prolonged your kindness with them for many years*, and you solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples. [31]*However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God.* NET

. . . and God is forgiving

Mic 7:18–19 Who is a God like you? *You forgive sin and overlook the rebellion of your faithful people. You will not be angry forever, because you would rather show mercy.* [19]*You will again have compassion on us. You will overcome our wrongdoing. You will throw all our sins into the deep sea.* GW

Note: God is patient – allowing people to repent

2Pet 3:9b *God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.* CEV

c) Benevolence

Benevolence involves showing goodness, kindness and generosity.

God is good

Ps 119:68 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You are good and you do good.* Teach me your statutes! NET

When the Bible says that God is good, arguably there are two concepts in view. God is good in that he is: (a) morally upright; and (b) generous and kind towards his people (and all his creatures). The first concept reflects God's holiness (and so is pertinent to the first half of this chapter). The latter concept is plainly indicative of his benevolence. The two concepts themselves are by no means unrelated, as God's upright character produces his generous and kind actions.

God shows great goodness

Ps 145:7, 9 [DAVID:] They shall pour forth the fame of *your abundant goodness* and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. ... [9]*The LORD is good to all*, and his mercy is over all that he has made. ESV

God exercises kindness

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because *he is kind to ungrateful and evil people*. NET

Titus 3:4–5a But when *the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown*, [5]he saved us because of his mercy. NCV™

God is generous

James 1:5 But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask *God, who gives to all generously* and without reprimand, and it will be given to him. NET

The phrase "without reprimand" may be implying that God "won't correct you for asking" (CEV) or possibly that God will not use any fault in a person as a reason not to give them what they have asked. In any case, the verse points to the fact that God gives "ungrudgingly" (AMP, NRSV; cf. NLT).

God gives good gifts . . .

Matt 7:11 *If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* NET

. . . God is the ultimate source of all gifts

James 1:17 *All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father* of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change. NET

d) Jealousy

The Hebrew and Greek words translated as "jealousy" convey a very forceful passion. When used of God, "jealousy" is spoken of in a positive light, as a virtuous attribute aligned with his profound commitment to and love for his people. God's jealousy in regard to his people is comparable to that of a husband or wife. Their jealousy is a product of their intense love for each other and evoked by anything that poses a threat to their relationship. As such God's jealousy is expressed in action against whatever threatens his people or his relationship with them. Thus it is expressed both against hostile forces – bringing salvation to his people – and in punishing any unfaithfulness of his people, leading them back to him.

God is a jealous God

Deut 4:24 [Moses, to Israel:] For the Lord your God is a consuming fire; *he is a jealous God*. NET

God's jealousy is sometimes compared to fire devouring or destroying that which has aroused it.

God's jealousy arises in response to his people's sin

1Ki 14:22 Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord. *They made him more jealous by their sins than their ancestors had done.* NET

God's jealousy arises particularly in response to unfaithfulness

Deut 32:20–21 'I will no longer help them,' he [God] said; 'then I will see what happens to them, *those stubborn, unfaithful people.* [21]*With their idols they have made me angry, jealous with their so-called gods*, gods that are really not gods. GNT

God is jealous for his people and their well-being . . .

Zec 8:2–5 *Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.* [3]Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. [4]Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. [5]And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ESV

God's jealousy for Zion (v. 2) – i.e. Jerusalem - has in view her restoration (vv. 3–5; cf. GNT) and expressing wrath towards her enemies (cf. AMP, CEV, GNT).

. . . and God is zealous in working for his people's cause

2Ki 19:30–31 And *the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward.* [31]*For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord will do this.* ESV

Note that in both ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek, the word that is translated as "jealousy" is also the one which is translated as "zeal" – depending on the context. Hence God's jealousy and his zeal are related.

Note: In his zeal God punishes his enemies

Isa 59:17–18 He [God] put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; *he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.* [18]*According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies*; to the coastlands he will render repayment. ESV

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 3

Jesus Christ

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I. General

The NT makes remarkable claims about aspects of Jesus Christ's being and his character. In doing so it shows Jesus Christ's nature to mirror that of God, and so points to his deity (his "God nature"). The NT also often refers to Jesus Christ's "name", making it a further concept that is important to grasp.

a) Jesus Christ's Eternity

Jesus Christ is alive

Rom 6:10 [Paul, speaking of Jesus:] For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but *the life he lives, he lives to God*. NET

Jesus Christ existed in the beginning . . .

1Jn 2:13a [John, to believers:] I am writing to you, fathers, because you know *him who has existed from the beginning*. GNT

Jesus Christ existed in the beginning, before all time.

. . . Jesus Christ was before all things

John 17:5 [Jesus, to God:] And now, Father, glorify me at your side with *the glory I had with you before the world was created*. NET

Jesus Christ will be alive forever

Heb 7:24–25 But because *Jesus lives forever, he will never stop serving as priest.* [25]*So he is able always to save those who come to God through him because he always lives*, asking God to help them. NCV™

Jesus Christ is self-existing – he is "the life"

John 5:26 For as the Father has life in himself, so *he has granted the Son also to have life in himself*. ESV

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life.* The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live. ISV

Descriptions of Jesus Christ as "the life" reflect the fact that he has life inherent (cf. 5:26) as part of his essential nature, and as such is self-existing. Primarily they point to Jesus Christ as the source of life – the one who gives life – as the latter part of this verse suggests.

Jesus Christ remains the same

Heb 13:8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever!* NET

b) Jesus Christ's Pre-Eminence

See also:

- *d) Jesus Christ as Lord of All*, p. 153

Jesus Christ is greater than all people

John 3:31 [John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus:] *The one who comes from above is superior to all.* The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. *The one who comes from heaven is superior to all.* NET

Jesus Christ is greater than all things

Col 1:15–18 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,* [16]*for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him* – all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers – *all things were created through him and for him.* [17]*He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him.* [18]*He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things.* NET

The term "firstborn" (v. 15) points to Christ's pre-eminence. It alludes to the privileged status of a firstborn son in a Jewish family.

Jesus Christ has divine glory

Matt 25:31 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.* NET

Note that "the Son of Man" was the title Jesus used for himself the most – approximately 80 times. It is a messianic title (cf. Dan 7:13–14), but it also underlines his humanity.

A vision of Jesus Christ, indicative of his surpassing greatness and glory

Rev 5:11–13 [John, describing a vision:] *Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels in a circle around the throne, as well as the living creatures and the elders. Their number was ten thousand times ten thousand – thousands times thousands –*[12]*all of whom were singing in a loud voice: "Worthy is the lamb who was killed to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and praise!"* [13]*Then I heard every creature – in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all that is in them – singing: "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and ruling power forever and ever!"* NET

The "Lamb" (vv. 12, 13) is a name for Jesus Christ, alluding to his sacrificial death which in a number of aspects mirrored the offering of a lamb at Passover and/or as a sin offering.

Jesus Christ has mighty, sovereign power

Eph 6:10 [Paul, to believers:] Finally, build up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of *his mighty power*. GNT

Phil 3:20–21 [Paul, to believers:] But our citizenship is in heaven – and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21]who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of his glorious body by means of *that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself*. NET

Jesus Christ has superlative knowledge and wisdom

John 16:30 [The disciples, to Jesus:] Now *we know that you know everything* and do not need anyone to ask you anything. Because of this we believe that you have come from God. NET

Luke 21:15 [Jesus, to his disciples:] For *I will give you the words along with the wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict*. NET

Jesus Christ has wisdom far superior to that of any adversary that believers may encounter.

Jesus Christ is everywhere

Eph 4:10 So Jesus came down, and he is the same One who went up above all the sky. *Christ did that to fill everything with his presence.* NCV™

Matt 18:20 [Jesus:] For *where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them.* NET

Jesus Christ is with all believers everywhere – always.

c) Jesus Christ's Character

See also:

- *c) Jesus Christ's Personality* [in his mission], p. 121

Jesus Christ is holy

Acts 4:27 [Believers, to God:] Then they turned against *your holy Servant Jesus*, your chosen Messiah. CEV

Heb 7:26–28 Jesus, then, is the High Priest that meets our needs. *He is holy; he has no fault or sin in him; he has been set apart from sinners* and raised above the heavens. [27]*He is not like other high priests; he does not need to offer sacrifices every day for his own sins* first and then for the sins of the people. He offered one sacrifice, once and for all, when he offered himself. [28]*The Law of Moses appoints men who are imperfect to be high priests; but God's promise made with the vow, which came later than the Law, appoints the Son, who has been made perfect for ever*. GNT

Jesus Christ is righteous . . .

1Jn 2:1b [John, to believers:] But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, *Jesus Christ the righteous One* … NET

. . . Jesus Christ judges in righteousness and with justice

Ps 72:2 *He will judge Your people with righteousness, And Your poor with justice.* NKJV

This is from a messianic passage, understood to be ultimately fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is faithful

2Thes 3:3 But *the Lord is faithful*, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. NET

Jesus Christ is loving

Eph 3:18–19 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to *understand the greatness of Christ's love—how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is.* [19]*Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know*, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God. NCV™

Jesus Christ shows grace . . .

1Tim 1:14 And *the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant*, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. NKJV

. . . and Jesus Christ is merciful

Jude 1:21 [JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] Remain in God's love as you *look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you eternal life*. GW

Jesus Christ can display anger

Rev 6:16–17 They [people in the end times] said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who is seated on the throne and from *the wrath of the Lamb,* [17]*because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to withstand it?*" NET

d) Jesus Christ's 'Name'

In biblical times, a person's name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and significance. This concept is in view in references to the "name" of a person.

Jesus Christ's "name" signifies Jesus Christ himself

Rom 10:12–13 For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses *all who call on him*. [13]For *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord* will be saved. NET

The fact that Jesus Christ's "name" is synonymous with him is illustrated by the equivalent phrases "call on him" (v. 12) and "calls on the name of the Lord" (v. 13).

Jesus Christ's "name" is correlated with his authority and power

Acts 3:6–7, 16 But Peter said [to a crippled man], "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"* [7]*And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.* ... [PETER, SPEAKING OF JESUS' NAME:] [16]And *his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong* whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. ESV

Peter gave the command in the "name" or by the authority of Jesus Christ, his name representing or incorporating his authority and power – "By the power of Jesus Christ" (NCV).

Jesus Christ's "name" signifies him in his attainment of forgiveness of sins

1Jn 2:12 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I am writing to you, little children, that *your sins have been forgiven because of his name*. NET

Jesus Christ's "name" signifies him in his attainment of salvation and eternal life

Acts 4:12 And *there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved*. NET

1Jn 5:13 [JOHN:] I have written these things to *you who believe in the name of the Son of God* so that you may *know that you have eternal life*. NET

Jesus Christ's "name" signifies him in his gospel and cause

Acts 9:15–16 But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man [Saul] is *my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.* [16]*For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*" NET

Saul (later known as Paul) was to take the message about Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. This would result in him suffering greatly for Jesus Christ and his cause – the cause of spreading the gospel.

Note: God has given Jesus Christ a name that is superior to all others

Phil 2:9b–11 *God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,* [10]*so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth –*[11]*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* to the glory of God the Father. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Jesus Christ and God

The claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is one of the most central teachings in the NT. In addition to this, the NT says much that associates Jesus Christ with God. This teaching forms the basis of a large portion of what distinguishes Christianity from other religions.

a) Jesus Christ Is the Son of God (I): General

Jesus Christ is the Son of God . . .

Heb 4:14 Therefore since we [believers] have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, *Jesus the Son of God*, let us hold fast to our confession. NET

. . . Jesus Christ is God's only Son

1Jn 4:9b *God has sent his one and only Son* into the world so that we may live through him. NET

God is Jesus Christ's Father

Col 1:3 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] We always thank *God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, in our prayers for you. GW

Note that the NT seems to use the term "God the Father" in a different sense to what we do when we use the term in reference to "God the Son" (which the NT does not use). The NT would appear to use "Father" as a title of God, to show or reflect God's relationship to Jesus Christ, his Son. This is reflected here by: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Jesus Christ is the image of God

2Cor 4:4b ... the glorious gospel of *Christ, who is the image of God*. NET

The assertion that Jesus Christ is the image of God – having the form and fullness of God (as per the following subsection) – reflects and supports the assertion that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Jesus Christ has the form and fullness of God – equality in nature

Phil 2:5–6 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, [6]who though *he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God* as something to be grasped ... NET

Col 1:19 For *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son* ... NET

The phrase "all his fullness" refers to: the fullness of God's nature (cf. GNT, NIrV) – "the sum total of the divine perfection, powers, and attributes" (AMP); and/or "all of himself" (NCV; cf. CEV, NLT), meaning that God himself in all his fullness dwells in Jesus Christ.

Note: The Father loves his Son

John 3:35 *The Father loves the Son and has placed all things under his authority.* NET

b) Jesus Christ Is the Son of God (II): Testimony

God testified to Jesus Christ being his Son

Matt 3:16–17 After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and *he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him.* [17]*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my one dear Son*; in him I take great delight." NET

Jesus Christ himself testified to being the Son of God

Matt 26:63–64a But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: *Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"* [64]*Jesus said to him, "It is as you said.* NKJV

Others also testified to Jesus Christ being the Son of God

Mark 3:11 *When evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"* NCV™

John 1:32–34 And *John gave this testimony*: "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. [33]I still did not know that he was the one, but God, who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' [34]*I have seen it," said John, "and I tell you that he is the Son of God*." GNT

Jesus Christ's deeds are evidence that he is the Son of God

John 20:30–31 *Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* [31]*But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that by believing you may have life in his name. NET

The phrase "these are recorded" (v. 31) refers to the miraculous signs that John did record as testimony to Jesus Christ being the Son of God, his miraculous deeds giving credence to his miraculous claim.

Other events of Jesus Christ's incarnation are further evidence

Matt 27:50–52, 54 *Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.* [51]*Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split apart.* [52]*And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised. ...* [54]*Now when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were extremely terrified and said, "Truly this one was God's Son!"* NET

Rom 1:3–4 It [the gospel] is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; [4]as *to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death*. GNT

Jesus Christ's resurrection is a powerful testimony to him being the Son of God.

c) Jesus Christ Is Identified with God

See also:

- *d) Jesus Christ Is Treated like God Is*, p. 30
- *II. God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit*, p. 37

Jesus Christ and the Father are one – each is in the other

John 17:11b, 21 Holy Father, keep them safe in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as *we are one*. ... [21]that that they will all be one, just as *you, Father, are in me and I am in you*. I pray that they will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. NET

This speaks of an inseparable unity, including a unity of purpose.

To know or see Jesus Christ is to know or see the Father

John 14:7–9 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *If you have known me, you will know my Father too. And from now on you do know him and have seen him."* [8]Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content." [9]Jesus replied, "Have I been with you for so long, and you have not known me, Philip? *The person who has seen me has seen the Father!* How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? NET

Jesus Christ is called "God" . . .

John 20:28 *Thomas replied to him* [Jesus], *"My Lord and my God!"* NET

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. ESV

Jesus Christ is understood to be "the Word" – with the man Jesus being the manifestation of "the Word" (cf. v. 14). Note that the phrases in view here (i.e. in italics) may have a qualitive sense (cf. REB; NET text note).

. . . and Jesus' usage of "I am" quite possibly alludes to God's name

John 8:57–59 So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" [58]*Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* [59]So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. NET

> Jesus uses the phrase "I am" (v. 58) in a manner that may well be a reference to the name God gave for himself to Moses – "I am who I am" and its shortened form "I am" – in Exodus 3:14.

OT references to God are applied to Jesus Christ

Eph 4:7–8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But *to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.* [8]*Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he captured captives; he gave gifts to men*." NET

> Verse 8 quotes Psalm 68:18 and Philippians 2:9–11 below alludes to Isaiah 45:23b. Both of the OT verses contain references to God which are applied to Jesus Christ in these NT verses.

Phil 2:9–11 As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, [10]so that *at the name of Jesus every knee will bow* – in heaven and on earth and under the earth –[11]*and every tongue confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. NET

Some actions are attributed to both God and Jesus Christ

Luke 8:38–39 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, [39]"Return to your home, and *declare what God has done for you*." So he went away, *proclaiming throughout the whole town what Jesus had done for him*. NET

Mark 2:5–7 *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."* [6]Now some of the experts in the law were sitting there, turning these things over in their minds: [7]"Why does this man speak this way? He is blaspheming! *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" NET

> Although the teachers of the law were mistaken in thinking that Jesus could not forgive sins, they were correct in asserting that the authority and capacity to forgive sins belongs to God.

Note: There is one God, the Father – and one Lord, Jesus Christ

1Cor 8:4–6 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "*there is no God but one*." [5]For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"— [6]yet *for us there is one God, the Father*, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, *and one Lord, Jesus Christ*, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. ESV

> Verses that refer to the Father alone as being God, may be using "God" to refer to the position of sovereign over all (cf. 1Tim 6:15) – i.e. they may be using "God" to refer to an exclusivity of position rather than exclusivity of divine nature. (This may also be the case with other verses that speak of there being only one "God".) Such a meaning is: consistent with the words translated as "God"/"god" in the OT originally speaking primarily of strength; consistent with the references to the Father being Jesus Christ's God (cf. *God is both Jesus Christ's God and his Father*, p. 31); and not contrary to Jesus Christ being fully divine. However, such an interpretation is not standard Christian theology.

d) Jesus Christ Is Treated like God Is

> The fact that Christians relate to (or treat) Jesus Christ in ways in which they relate to God, further reflects Jesus Christ's identification with God and that he is God's Son. Thus the teaching in this section supplements the teaching in the previous sections.

Jesus Christ is worshiped

Matt 14:33 And *those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."* ESV

> The disciples worshiped Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus Christ is honored and glorified

John 5:22–23 Furthermore, the Father does not judge anyone, but has assigned all judgment to the Son, [23]so that *all people will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father* who sent him. NET

2Pet 3:18 [Peter, to believers:] But grow in the grace and knowledge of *our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Glory be to him now and forever!* Amen. NCV™

People pray to Jesus Christ

John 14:14 [Jesus, to his disciples:] If you *ask me anything in my name*, I will do it. NET

Acts 7:59–60 They continued to stone Stephen while *he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"* [60]*Then he fell to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"* When he had said this, he died. NET

People obey and serve Jesus Christ

Matt 28:19–20a [Jesus, to his disciples:] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20]*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. NET

James 1:1a From *James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ*. CEV

People have faith in Jesus Christ

John 14:1 Jesus said to his disciples, "Don't be worried! *Have faith in God and have faith in me.* CEV

People put their hope in Jesus Christ

1Thes 1:3b [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] And we thank him that you continue to be strong because of *your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*. NCV™

e) Jesus Christ Is Under God's Authority

See also:

- *d) Epilogue: God Works through Jesus Christ*, p. 122

This section looks at the concept of Jesus Christ being subordinate to God in regard to authority – which involves "functional subordination" – as opposed to subordination or inferiority in regard to essence or being.

The concept of Jesus Christ being eternally subordinate to God (rather than only during his incarnation) is a historical doctrine that is still debated by Christian scholars. As such, some would disagree with or wish to qualify propositions put forward in this section.

God is both Jesus Christ's God and his Father

John 20:17 Jesus replied, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending *to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*.'" NET

Eph 1:3, 17 [Paul, to believers:] Blessed is *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. … [17]I pray that *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father* of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him, … NET

The expression "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3) also occurs in Romans 15:6, 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:3. 2 Corinthians 11:31 uses the similar expression, "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus …"

Jesus Christ is described as being subordinate to God

1Cor 11:3 [Paul:] But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and *God is the head of Christ*. NET

1Cor 15:28 But when everything has been put under him, then *the Son himself will also become subject to the one who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all*. ISV

Jesus Christ was chosen and sent by God

Luke 9:35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "*This is my Son, whom I have chosen*. Listen to him!" NCV™

John 8:42 Jesus replied, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for *I have come from God* and am now here. *I have not come on my own initiative, but he sent me.* NET

Jesus Christ is God's servant

Acts 4:30 [The early believers, praying to God:] Stretch out your hand to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the name of *your holy Servant Jesus*. GNT

Heb 8:2 *He* [Christ] *serves as High Priest* in the Most Holy Place, that is, in the real tent which was put up by the Lord, not by human hands. GNT

God's seniority is reflected by the things that he has done for Jesus Christ

John 5:26 For as the Father has life in himself, so *he has granted the Son also to have life in himself*. ESV

Col 1:19 For *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son …* NET

Heb 1:1–2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2]but in these last days he has spoken to us by *his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things*, through whom also he created the world. ESV

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 4

The Holy Spirit

I

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I

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I. General

See also:

- *II. God's Holy Spirit in His People*, p. 183

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, as often indicated in the Bible. This assertion is reflected by the Holy Spirit's divine and imposing attributes. However, the Bible also distinguishes the Holy Spirit from God, portraying him as a personal being in his own right.

(Note that in regard to the Holy Spirit and God's people, see *God's Holy Spirit in His People*, cross referenced above.)

a) The Holy Spirit of God

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God . . .

Gen 1:2 Now [in the beginning] the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but *the Spirit of God* was moving over the surface of the water. NET

Eph 4:30 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And do not grieve *the Holy Spirit of God*, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. NET

The Holy Spirit is God's spirit. As such one should bear in mind that when the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit, it is in effect speaking of God himself.

. . . God refers to the Holy Spirit as his Spirit

Ezek 39:29 I will no longer hide my face from them, *when I pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD*. NET

"Spirit" clearly is referring to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is correlated with God's presence

1Jn 3:24 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] And the person who keeps his commandments resides in God, and God in him. Now *by this we know that God resides in us: by the Spirit he has given us*. NET

This verse correlates the Holy Spirit with God's presence by asserting that the fact that believers have God's Spirit verifies that God lives in them.

The Holy Spirit is from God

See also:

- *G*, p. 123
- *a) God Gives the Holy Spirit to His People*, p. 183

1Cor 2:12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but *the Spirit who is from God*, so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God. NET

Acts 2:33 He [Jesus Christ] has been exalted to the right hand of God, has *received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit*, and has poured out what you are seeing and hearing. ISV

God and the Holy Spirit know each other's mind

Rom 8:27 And *he* [God] *who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit*, because the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God's will. NET

1Cor 2:10–11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *The Spirit searches out all things, even the deep secrets of God.* [11]Who knows the thoughts that another person has? Only a person's spirit that lives within him knows his thoughts. It is the same with God. *No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* NCV™

b) The Holy Spirit's Being

In addition to the following charactersitics, as the Holy "Spirit", the Holy Spirit has no visible form.

The Holy Spirit is everywhere

Ps 139:7–8 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?* [8]*If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!* ESV

Verse 7 links the Holy Spirit with God's presence, and so along with v. 8 implies that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent – i.e. everywhere.

The Holy Spirit is eternal

Heb 9:14a How much more is done by the blood of Christ. He offered himself through *the eternal Spirit* as a perfect sacrifice to God. NCV™

The Holy Spirit has great power . . .

Isa 11:2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him [the Messiah], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, *the Spirit of counsel and might*, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ESV

1Jn 4:4 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] You are from God, little children, and have conquered them, because *the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*. NET

> The "one who is in you" is most likely referring to the Holy Spirit. As such, the description of the Holy Spirit as greater than Satan – "the one who is in the world" – is indicative of the Spirit's great power.

. . . and the Holy Spirit can enable people to do great things

Zec 4:6b–7 [GOD, TO ZERUBBABEL:] *'Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD who rules over all." [7]"What are you, you great mountain? Because of Zerubbabel you will become a level plain! And he will bring forth the temple capstone* with shoutings of 'Grace! Grace!' because of this." NET

> Zerubbabel would not rebuild the temple with the aid of outstanding human might or power, but through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit (v. 6) – who would help Zerubbabel overcome mountainous obstacles (v. 7a).

The Holy Spirit has great knowledge . . .

John 14:26 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] But the Advocate, *the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, *will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you*. NET

> That the Holy Spirit would teach them "everything" and cause them to remember everything Jesus had said to them is indicative of the Holy Spirit's profound knowledge.

. . . The Holy Spirit even has knowledge of the future

1Tim 4:1 *Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings* ... NET

The Holy Spirit has great wisdom

Acts 6:9–10 But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. [10]Yet *they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke*. NET

> This suggests that Stephen's profound wisdom was a product of the Holy Spirit – indicative of the Holy Spirit having great wisdom.

c) The Holy Spirit's Personhood

The Holy Spirit is distinguished from God and Jesus Christ

John 15:26 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] But *when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.* ESV

Eph 4:4–6 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *There is one body and one Spirit*, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, [5]*one Lord*, one faith, one baptism, [6]*one God and Father of all*, who is over all and through all and in all. NET

The Holy Spirit has a mind

Rom 8:27 And he [God] who searches our hearts knows *the mind of the Spirit*, because the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God's will. NET

1Cor 12:11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But it is *the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us*. CEV

> That the Holy Spirit "decides" such things is indicative of him having his own mind and will.

The Holy Spirit is referred to with personal pronouns

John 16:13 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But when *he, the Spirit of truth*, comes, *he* will guide you into all truth. For *he* will not speak on *his* own authority, but will speak whatever *he* hears, and will tell you what is to come. NET

1Cor 6:19 [Paul, to believers:] Or do you not know that your body is the temple of *the Holy Spirit who* is in you, *whom* you have from God, and you are not your own? NET

> The fact that personal pronouns are used of the Holy Spirit suggests that he is an entity in his own right, as well as alluding to him being a personal being.

The Holy Spirit has personal characteristics

Rom 15:30 [Paul, to believers:] Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through *the love of the Spirit*, to join fervently with me in prayer to God on my behalf. NET

Gal 5:22–23a But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23]*gentleness, and self-control*. NET

> Each of these characteristics is described as a "fruit of the Spirit" because – like fruit from a tree – their source and means of growth is the Holy Spirit. Arguably this implies that as their source and the one who fosters them, the Holy Spirit's own character is reflected in them.

The Holy Spirit communicates . . .

Rom 8:16 [Paul, to believers:] *The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children*. NET

Rom 8:26b [Paul, to believers:] But *the Spirit himself speaks to God for us*, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. NCV™

. . . and the Holy Spirit interacts in other ways

Acts 9:31b The church became stronger, as *the Holy Spirit encouraged it and helped it grow*. CEV

Rom 8:14 For all who are *led by the Spirit of God* are the sons of God. NET

Note: Like a person, the Holy Spirit can be treated wrongly

Eph 4:30 [Paul, to believers:] And *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. NET

> Note that this verse indicates that – like people – the Holy Spirit has feelings. This further testifies to the Holy Spirit's personhood.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

See also:

▪ *I*, p. 28

The NT speaks of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as three identities, but also shows them as being related to each other in a unique unity. This is in part due to divine attributes and roles being attributed to each of them. Since the 4th century the church has viewed their relationship in terms of the *Doctrine of the Trinity* – the concept of them being three "persons" but one substance.

This close-knit relationship between God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is still one of the most intriguing and debated aspects of the Bible. The following provides some basic "building blocks" for coming to terms with it.

a) Mutual Association

God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are very closely associated

Matt 28:19 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in *the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit* … NET

The phrase "the name of" denotes a single name. Here it is applied to all three of the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As such it points to a very close relationship between the three.

2Cor 13:14 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* NCV™

The close association of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is pointed to by the attributing of these complementary blessings to the three of them at the one time.

The Holy Spirit is identified with God . . .

Acts 5:3, 4b But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart *to lie to the Holy Spirit* and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? [4]… *You have not lied to people but to God!*" NET

Peter indicates that to lie to the Holy Spirit (v. 3) is to lie to God (v. 4). As such Peter identifies the Holy Spirit with God.

. . . and the Holy Spirit is also identified with Jesus Christ

2Cor 3:17–18 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *the Lord is the Spirit*, and where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom. [18]And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from *the Lord, who is the Spirit*. NET

There are a number of interpretations of "the Lord is the Spirit" (v. 17) and "the Lord, who is the Spirit" (v. 18). The ones that are arguably the most plausible are compatible with a literal reading, demonstrating the very close association between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is described as both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ

Rom 8:9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed *the Spirit of God* lives in you. Now if anyone does not have *the Spirit of Christ*, this person does not belong to him. NET

This not only closely correlates the Holy Spirit with God and with Jesus Christ, it also associates Jesus Christ with God, with the one Spirit being said to be of them both.

God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit work together in unity of purpose . . .

John 20:21–22 So Jesus said to them [the disciples] again, "Peace be with you. *Just as the Father has sent me, I also send you.*" [22]*And after he said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* NET

The Father sent Jesus Christ to carry out his purposes and Jesus Christ sends his people empowered with the Holy Spirit to continue his work.

. . . Most prominently, they work together in saving people

Acts 5:31–32 [Peter and the other apostles:] *God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.* [32]*And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.* NET

Verse 32 points to the Holy Spirit's role in the salvation of people, witnessing to them. This work of the Holy Spirit is in conjunction with God's will, and with what God has done through Jesus Christ (v. 31) to save people.

b) Mutual Divine Attributes

The listings here and in the following section of mutual divine attributes and roles are not comprehensive. Note that the subsections usually have three verses – of which the first refers to God, the second to Jesus Christ and the third to the Holy Spirit.

Omnipresence – God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are everywhere

Jer 23:24b "Do you not know that *I am everywhere*?" the Lord asks. NET

Eph 4:10b *Christ did that to fill everything with his presence.* NCV™

Ps 139:7 [David, to God:] *Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?* Where can I run from you? NCV™

Omnipotence – they each have infinite, sovereign power

Job 42:2 *I know, Lord, that you are all-powerful; that you can do everything you want.* GNT

Phil 3:20b–21 *Our Lord Jesus Christ* [21]*has power over everything,* and he will make these poor bodies of ours like his own glorious body. CEV

1Jn 4:4 [John, to believers:] You are from God, little children, and have conquered them, because *the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* NET

As noted earlier, "the one who is in you" – who is greater than Satan – is most likely referring to the Holy Spirit. As such this is illustrative of the Holy Spirit's supreme power.

Omniscience – they each have complete knowledge

1Jn 3:20 If our conscience condemns us, we know that God is greater than our conscience and that *he knows everything.* GNT

John 16:30a [Jesus' disciples, to Jesus:] Now *we know that you know everything* and do not need anyone to ask you anything. NET

1Cor 2:10b For *the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.* NET

The Holy Spirit searches out or finds out all things (cf. CEV, NCV, NLT).

Divine glory

Num 14:21 [God:] But truly, as I live, *all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.* NET

Matt 25:31 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.* NET

1Pet 4:14 [Peter, to believers:] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because *the Spirit of glory,* who is the Spirit of God, rests on you. NET

Eternal existence

Ps 93:2 [A psalmist, to God:] Your throne is established from of old; *you are from everlasting.* ESV

Rev 22:13 [Jesus Christ:] *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end!* NET

Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, used together to depict Jesus Christ spanning all time – as do the subsequent pairings in the verse.

Heb 9:14a How much more is done by the blood of Christ. He offered himself through *the eternal Spirit* as a perfect sacrifice to God. NCV™

Holiness

Rev 4:8b "*Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God,* the All–Powerful, Who was and who is, and who is still to come!" NET

John 6:69 [The disciples, to Jesus:] *We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God!* NET

Heb 10:15a *The Holy Spirit* also tells us about this. NCV™

c) Mutual Divine Roles

Common divine roles reflect the fact that God works through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Note that the latter roles are not exclusively divine in every sense, with believers also having roles akin to them.

God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are each ascribed a primary role in creation

1Cor 8:6 But for us, "*There is only one God, the Father. Everything came from him*, and we live for him. *There is only one Lord, Jesus Christ. Everything came into being through him*, and we live because of him." GW

Job 33:4 [Elihu:] *The Spirit of God has made me*, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. NET

They each give spiritual or eternal life

1Jn 5:11b *God has given us eternal life*, and this life is in his Son. NET

John 5:21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also *the Son gives life to whomever he wishes*. NET

John 6:63a *The Spirit is the one who gives life*; human nature is of no help! NET

They each make God's people holy

Lev 20:8 Obey my laws, because *I am the Lord and I make you holy*. GNT

Eph 5:25–27 Husbands, love your wives just as *Christ loved the church and gave himself for her* [26]*to sanctify her by cleansing her* with the washing of the water by the word, [27]so that he may present the church to himself as glorious – *not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless*. NET

Rom 15:16b [Paul:] I do this in order that I might bring the nations to God as an acceptable offering, *made holy by the Holy Spirit*. GW

They each are constantly with God's people

Deut 31:8 [Moses, to the Israelites:] The Lord will lead you into the land. *He will always be with you* and help you, so don't ever be afraid of your enemies. CEV

Matt 28:20b [Jesus, to his disciples:] And remember, *I am with you always*, to the end of the age. NET

John 14:17b [Jesus, to his disciples:] But you know *the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you.* CEV

They each strengthen God's people

Isa 41:10b *I am your God. I will strengthen you.* I will help you. I will support you with my victorious right hand. GW

Phil 4:13 *I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.* GW

Acts 1:8 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth. NET

They each teach God's people

Isa 48:17b [God, to Israel:] *I am the Lord your God. I teach you what is best for you. I lead you where you should go.* GW

2Tim 2:7 [Paul, to Timothy:] Think about what I am saying and *the Lord will give you understanding of all this*. NET

John 14:26 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But the Advocate, *the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, *will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you*. NET

They each give God's people joy and peace

Rom 15:13 [Paul, to believers:] Now *may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace* as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. NET

John 15:11 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.* NET

John 14:27 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you*; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage. NET

Gal 5:22–23 But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23]gentleness, and self–control. Against such things there is no law. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 5

Angels, Satan and Demons

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I. Angels

The Bible often mentions angels. The existence and role of these mighty servants of God should be a great encouragement to believers. This is in no small part due to the fact that their work often involves believers, including giving believers supernatural help.

Note that while the great majority of references to angels in the Bible are to God's holy angels, evil angels are also mentioned. These evil angels are commonly identified with demons (discussed in the second half of this chapter). In headings in this book, "Angels" primarily refer to angels of God. But bear in mind that some concepts, such as angels being very powerful, are applicable to all angels.

a) Attributes of Angels

Angels have human-like features, but are very awesome in appearance

Dan 10:5–6 [Daniel, describing a vision:] *I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen; around his waist was a belt made of gold from Upaz.* 6*His body resembled yellow jasper, and his face had an appearance like lightning. His eyes were like blazing torches; his arms and feet had the gleam of polished bronze. His voice thundered forth like the sound of a large crowd.* NET

This is describing an angel. The reference to the angel as a "man" and the mention of his human-like features (waist, face, eyes, arms and feet) suggest that angels have a human-like form.

Angels have wings and can fly

Isa 6:2 [Isaiah, describing a vision of a scene in heaven:] *Seraphs stood over him* [God]; *each one had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and they used the remaining two to fly.* NET

The "seraphs" are apparently a high order or class of angelic beings. This verse illustrates that at least some kinds of angelic beings have wings.

Angels are very powerful

2Thes 1:7b He will do this when the Lord Jesus is revealed, coming from heaven *with his mighty angels* in a blazing fire. GW

Matt 28:2 Suddenly *there was a severe earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descending from heaven came and rolled away the stone and sat on it.* NET

The accompanying earthquake appears to be indicative of the angel's awesome power. The stone was the very large one that had sealed the entrance to Jesus' tomb.

Angels have great wisdom and knowledge – but their knowledge is limited

2Sam 14:20 [A wise woman, to David:] My master, *you are wise like an angel of God who knows everything that happens on earth.* NCV™

Mark 13:32 [Jesus, speaking of the time of his return:] But *as for that day or hour no one knows it – neither the angels in heaven*, nor the Son – except the Father. NET

Angels can communicate and interact with others

1Ki 19:5–7 Then he [Elijah] lay down under the tree and slept. *Suddenly an angel came to him and touched him. "Get up and eat," the angel said.* 6Elijah saw near his head a loaf baked over coals and a jar of water, so he ate and drank. Then he went back to sleep. 7Later the Lord's angel came to him a second time. *The angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat. If you don't, the journey will be too hard for you."* NCV™

Angels have a will

1Pet 1:12 They [the prophets] were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through those who proclaimed the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – *things angels long to catch a glimpse of.* NET

This clearly illustrates that angels have a will – also suggesting that they have a mind and the ability to reason.

Angels have emotions – notably joy

Job 38:6–7 [God, to Job:] What were the earth's foundations set on, or who put its cornerstone in place 7while the morning stars sang together and *all the angels shouted with joy*? NCV™

Note that the fact that angels have a will and emotions suggests that they are personal beings.

Angels are holy

Mark 8:38 [Jesus:] For if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with *the holy angels*. NET

Further attributes of angels

Heb 1:14 *All the angels are spirits* who serve God and are sent to help those who will receive salvation. NCV™

Angels are spiritual beings.

Luke 20:36 *Nor can they die anymore, because they are like the angels* and, since they share in the resurrection, are God's children. ISV

Angels are immortal.

b) Angels and God

Angels are with God, surrounding him and even standing in his presence

Rev 5:11a [John, describing a vision of a scene in heaven:] Then *I looked and heard the voice of many angels in a circle around the throne*, as well as the living creatures and the elders. NET

Luke 1:19 *The angel answered him* [Zechariah], *"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God*, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. NET

Angels worship God and Jesus Christ

Rev 7:11–12 [John, describing a vision of a scene in heaven:] And *all the angels* stood there in a circle around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and *they threw themselves down with their faces to the ground before the throne and worshiped God,* [12]*saying, "Amen! Praise and glory, and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"* NET

Heb 1:6 And when God brings *his firstborn Son* into the world, he says, *"Let all God's angels worship him."* NCV™

Angels serve God . . .

Ps 103:20–21 Praise the Lord, *you angels of his, you powerful warriors who carry out his decrees and obey his orders!* [21]*Praise the Lord, all you warriors of his, you servants of his who carry out his desires!* NET

. . . Angels carry out judgments of God

Ps 78:49 *He* [God] *sent his burning anger, rage, fury, and hostility against them. He sent an army of destroying angels.* GW

Rev 16:1–4 [John, describing a vision:] *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple declaring to the seven angels: "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God's wrath."* [2]*So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth. Then ugly and painful sores appeared on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.* [3]*Next, the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea and it turned into blood, like that of a corpse, and every living creature that was in the sea died.* [4]*Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they turned into blood.* NET

Carrying out judgments of God is a prominent role of angels in their service of God. Note that the "loud voice from the temple" (v. 1) is presumably that of God, giving directions to angels.

Angels serve Jesus Christ

Matt 13:41 *The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes sin as well as all lawbreakers.* NET

Matt 26:53 [Jesus:] Don't you think that *I could call on my Father to send more than twelve legions of angels to help me now*? GNT

c) Angels and God's People

Angels help and care for God's people

Heb 1:14 *What are all the angels? They are spirits sent to serve those who are going to receive salvation.* GW

Ps 34:7 *The LORD's angel camps around the LORD's loyal followers and delivers them.* NET

Ps 91:11–12 For *he* [God] *will order his angels to protect you in all you do.* 12*They will lift you up in their hands, so you will not slip and fall on a stone.* NET

Verse 12 figuratively depicts the work of angels in protecting God's people.

Examples of angels, sent by God, saving God's people

Dan 6:22 [DANIEL, TO KING DARIUS:] *My God sent his angel and closed the lions' mouths so that they have not harmed me,* because I was found to be innocent before him. Nor have I done any harm to you, O king. NET

Acts 12:11 When Peter came to himself, he said, *"Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen."* NET

Angels give God's people messages, such as instructions

Acts 10:3–6 About three o'clock one afternoon *he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius."* 4Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, "What is it, Lord?" The angel said to him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God. 5*Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called Peter.* 6*This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea."* NET

Note that the Hebrew and Greek words for "angel" carry the meaning "messenger".

Angels also give messages about future events

Acts 27:23–24 [PAUL:] For *last night an angel of the God to whom I belong* and whom I serve came to me 24and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul! *You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.'* NET

Rev 22:6 And he [an angel] said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And *the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."* ESV

Note: Angels played a role in the introduction of the Mosaic Law

Acts 7:53 [STEPHEN, TO THE JEWISH LEADERS:] *You received the law by decrees given by angels,* but you did not obey it. NET

Note that the term "the Mosaic Law" in the above subheading refers to the law that God gave through Moses, which is referred to in this verse.

d) Further Teaching about Angels

Angels are very important

Gal 4:14b [PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS IN GALATIA:] Instead, *you welcomed me as though I were an angel of God, as though I were Christ Jesus himself!* NET

This points to the great importance of angels, even making something of a parallel of them with Jesus Christ.

There are different kinds and ranks of angels

Isa 6:1–2 [ISAIAH, DESCRIBING A VISION OF A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2*Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings*: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. NKJV

As noted earlier, seraphim (or seraphs) are understood to be a high-ranking order of angels.

1Thes 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with *the voice of the archangel,* and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. NET

There are thousands upon thousands of angels

Rev 5:11 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION OF A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] Then *I looked and heard the voice of many angels* in a circle around the throne, as well as the living creatures and the elders. *Their number was ten thousand times ten thousand – thousands times thousands – …* NET

Angels reside in heaven

Matt 24:36 But as for that day and hour no one knows it – not even *the angels in heaven* – except the Father alone. NET

Angels are not to be worshiped

Rev 19:9–10 Then the angel said to me, "Write the following: Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!" He also said to me, "These are the true words of God." [10]So *I threw myself down at his feet to worship him, but he said, "Do not do this!* I am only a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony about Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." NET

II. Satan and Demons

See also:

- *II. Spiritual Warfare*, p. 396

Many people find the existence of Satan (i.e. the devil) and demons disturbing and choose to avoid the subject. But to live the Christian life it is vital to understand our chief opponents. Moreover, the Bible has a lot to say about Satan and demons – much of which is in fact encouraging to believers.

a) Satan's Evilness

See also:

- *c) Satan's Work against God's People*, p. 47

Satan is evil and is opposed to God's kingdom

Matt 13:19 *When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one* [Satan] *comes and snatches what was sown in his heart*; this is the seed sown along the path. NET

Satan is opposed to Jesus Christ

Luke 22:3–4 Then *Satan entered Judas*, called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples. [4]*So Judas went off and spoke with the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard about how he could betray Jesus to them.* GNT

2Cor 4:4 In their case *the god of this world* [Satan] *has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God. ESV

Satan is deceitful . . .

John 8:44 [JESUS, TO THE JEWS:] You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.* NET

. . . Those who follow Satan likewise are deceitful

Acts 13:9–10 But Saul (also known as Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at him [the magician Elymas] [10]and said, "*You who are full of all deceit and all wrongdoing, you son of the devil*, you enemy of all righteousness – will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? NET

Note: Possible reference to Satan's original state and his fall

Ezek 28:12, 15–17 Son of man, sing a lament for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'This is what the sovereign LORD says: "'*You were the sealer of perfection, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. ...* [15]*You were blameless in your behavior from the day you were created, until sin was discovered in you.* [16]*In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned; so I defiled you and banished you from the mountain of God – the guardian cherub expelled you from the midst of the stones of fire.* [17]*Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom on account of your splendor. I threw you down to the ground*; I placed you before kings, that they might see you. NET

This is either simply "a lament for the king of Tyre" (v. 12) containing highly figurative language, or additionally also descriptive of Satan.

b) Satan's Power

Satan is very powerful

Matt 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard this they said, "He does not cast out demons except by the power of *Beelzebul, the ruler of demons!*" NET

The name "Beelzebul" refers to Satan. The description of him as "the ruler of demons" points to his extraordinary power.

Heb 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he [Christ] likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy *the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil)*, ... NET

This most likely refers to Satan's power to induce people to sin and so to render them subject to the penalty of death. As such he effectively wields the power of death, an aspect of his very formidable power. In its ultimate or eternal sense, however, this power has now been nullified by Jesus Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

Satan has great power and authority in the world

Luke 4:5–6 Then *the devil* led him [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in a flash *all the kingdoms of the world*. [6]*And he said to him, "To you I will grant this whole realm – and the glory that goes along with it, for it has been relinquished to me, and I can give it to anyone I wish.* NET

1Jn 5:19 [JOHN:] We know that we are from God, and *the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*. NET

Satan works in and through unbelievers

Eph 2:2 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS IN EPHESUS:] Yes, in the past you lived the way the world lives, following the ruler of the evil powers that are above the earth. *That same spirit* [Satan] *is now working in those who refuse to obey God.* NCV™

2Tim 2:25b–26 Perhaps God will grant them [false teachers] repentance and then knowledge of the truth [26]and they will come to their senses and escape *the devil's trap where they are held captive to do his will*. NET

Satan is not as powerful as God . . .

Rom 16:20a [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet*. NET

. . . and Satan is not as powerful as Jesus Christ

Luke 11:14, 21–22 *Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the man who had been mute began to speak*, and the crowds were amazed. ... [21][JESUS:] When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his possessions are safe. [22]But *when a stronger man attacks and conquers him, he takes away the first man's armor on which the man relied and divides up his plunder.* NET

In v. 22 Jesus is referring to his overpowering of Satan, stripping him of his power and taking what was his – a truth demonstrated by Jesus driving out demons (v. 14) and thus releasing people from Satan's grip.

Note: Satan stands condemned

John 16:11b *... the ruler of this world has been condemned*. NET

c) Satan's Work against God's People

Satan schemes and fights against God's people

Eph 6:11, 16 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to *stand against the schemes of the devil*. ... [16]and in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can *extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*. NET

1Pet 5:8 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Be sober and alert. *Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.* NET

Satan tempts God's people . . .

1Thes 3:5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS IN THESSALONICA:] So when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith, for fear *that the tempter somehow tempted you* and our toil had proven useless. NET

. . . and Satan can lead them astray

2Cor 11:3 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] But I am afraid that *just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray* from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. NET

Paul was concerned that just as Eve was deceived by Satan, the Corinthians may also be led astray by false teachers who were ultimately inspired by Satan.

Satan can afflict God's people

Job 2:7 So *Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and he afflicted Job with a malignant ulcer from the sole of his feet to the top of his head.* NET

Rev 2:10 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA:] Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. *The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days.* Remain faithful *even to the point of death*, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. NET

Satan can only tempt and afflict as God and Jesus Christ permit

1Cor 10:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] No temptation has overtaken you that is unusual for human beings. But *God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. Instead, along with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it.* ISV

2Cor 12:7–9 [PAUL:] So that I would not become too proud of the wonderful things that were shown to me, *a painful physical problem was given to me. This problem was a messenger from Satan*, sent to beat me and keep me from being too proud. [8]*I begged the Lord three times to take this problem away from me.* [9]*But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you."* So I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me. NCV™

> Paul's affliction apparently came from Satan. But Paul implies that Jesus Christ permitted it, using it to both keep Paul from becoming conceited (v. 7) and make Paul receptive to Christ's power working in him. As such, this passage illustrates that God and Jesus Christ may permit Satan to afflict their people, but only in accordance with their purposes.

Satan accuses God's people before God

Job 1:8–11 So the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a pure and upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil." [9]*Then Satan answered the LORD, "Is it for nothing that Job fears God?* [10]*Have you not made a hedge around him and his household and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock have increased in the land.* [11]*But extend your hand and strike everything he has, and he will no doubt curse you to your face!"* NET

> The Greek word from which "Devil" comes, means "an accuser, a slanderer". In being used of Satan it points to him carrying out such activity, notably accusing and slandering believers before God (as is the case in this passage). To what extent Satan is still able to accuse believers before God, if at all, depends partly on the meaning of Revelation 12:7–12.

d) Demons

> Evil spiritual forces are referred to by a number of names, including "demons", "evil spirits", "spirits" and (evil) "angels". In order to be concise, only "Demons" has been used in this and the following subheadings.

Demons are evil and powerful spiritual beings

Eph 6:12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.* NET

> The terms "rulers" and "powers" are indicative of the great – but limited – power of demons. The last two clauses appear to together refer to the whole of the spiritual realm.

Demons are aligned with Satan

Rev 12:7–9 Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and *the dragon and his angels fought back*. [8]But the dragon was not strong enough to prevail, so there was no longer any place left in heaven for him and his angels. [9]So *that huge dragon – the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world – was thrown down to the earth, and his angels along with him.* NET

> This illustrates that evil angels or demons are aligned with Satan.

Demons are deceitful, propagating what is false

1Tim 4:1–2 Now the Holy Spirit clearly says that in the later times some people will stop believing the faith. *They will follow spirits that lie and teachings of demons.* [2]*Such teachings come from the false words of liars* whose consciences are destroyed as if by a hot iron. NCV™

Note that this refers to the teachings of demons as being spread by false teachers.

Demons can possess people . . .

Matt 8:28 When he [Jesus] came to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, *two demon–possessed men* coming from the tombs met him. They were extremely violent, so that no one was able to pass by that way. NET

Acts 19:13 But some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over *those who were possessed by evil spirits*, saying, "I sternly warn you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." NET

. . . Demons can cause people they possess much harm

Matt 15:22 A Canaanite woman from that area came to Jesus and cried out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! *My daughter has a demon, and she is suffering very much.*" NCV™

Luke 9:39 [A FATHER OF A DEMON-POSSESSED BOY:] *A spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions and causes him to foam at the mouth. It hardly ever leaves him alone, torturing him severely.* NET

Demons both fear and have to submit to God and Jesus Christ

James 2:19 *You believe that God is one*; well and good. *Even the demons believe that – and tremble with fear.* NET

Mark 1:25–27 But *Jesus rebuked him* [a demon–possessed man]: *"Silence! Come out of him!"* [26]*After throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.* [27]They were all amazed so that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! *He even commands the unclean spirits and they obey him*." NET

Demons face eternal punishment

Matt 25:41 Then he [Jesus Christ] will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into *the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

Unit B

God and the World: Basics

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CHAPTER 6

God’s Creation

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I

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I. General

The formation of the universe is the most astonishing thing that has ever occurred. The Bible claims that God not only created the universe, but that he also created everything in it. Moreover, it claims that God continues to maintain the universe. If we believe that God is capable of doing all this, then we should have little trouble in accepting the other claims that the Bible makes about God.

a) God Made All Things

God has made all things

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, since *you created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created!*" NET

God made the heavens and the earth – and everything in them

Neh 9:6a You are the only LORD. *You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, with all the stars. You made the earth and everything on it, the seas and everything in them; you give life to everything.* NCV™

Ex 20:11 For *in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them*, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ESV

Some believe that these "days" are literally six 24-hour days, while others take them to indicate six undetermined periods of time. The fact that God did not make the sun until the fourth "day" (cf. Gen 1:14–18) arguably supports the latter.

God made light, alongside the darkness

Gen 1:2–5 Now the earth was without shape and empty, and *darkness was over the surface of the watery deep*, but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water. [3]*God said, "Let there be light." And there was light!* [4]*God saw that the light was good, so God separated the light from the darkness.* [5]*God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."* There was evening, and there was morning, marking the first day. NET

Note that this and the following subsections listing the things God created are in chronological order (cf. Gen 1).

God made the sky

Gen 1:6–8 *God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters and let it separate water from water.* [7]*So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. It was so.* [8]*God called the expanse "sky."* There was evening, and there was morning, a second day. NET

Verses 6–7 may mean that the sky (the "expanse") separated the atmospheric waters (or clouds) from the waters of the earth, or that the earth was enveloped by a dense layer of moisture (cf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

God made land and sea

Gen 1:9–10 *God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear." It was so.* [10]*God called the dry ground "land" and the gathered waters he called "seas."* God saw that it was good. NET

God made vegetation

Gen 1:11 *God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: plants yielding seeds according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds." It was so.* NET

God made the sun, moon and stars

Gen 1:14–16 *God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be signs to indicate seasons and days and years,* [15]*and let them serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." It was so.* [16]*God made two great lights — the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night. He made the stars also.* NET

Genesis 1 indicates that God made "light" on the first "day" (cf. vv. 3–5), but did not make the sun and stars until the fourth "day" (cf. vv. 14–18). There are different explanations for this. Possibly these entities were made from that through which God first provided light and first marked off each "day" (cf. v. 5); i.e. the fourth "day" may speak of the source of light being made into the sun and stars.

God made all creatures and people

Gen 1:21, 25, 27 *God created the great sea creatures and every living and moving thing with which the water swarmed, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.* God saw that it was good. ... [25]*God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the cattle according to their kinds, and all the creatures that creep along the ground according to their kinds.* God saw that it was good. ... [27]*God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.* NET

Note: All that God makes is good

Gen 1:31a *God saw all that he had made – and it was very good!* NET

b) God Maintains Creation

Every creature's life is dependent on God

Job 12:10 *The life of every creature and the breath of all people are in God's hand.* NCV™

Ps 36:6 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Your justice is like the highest mountains, your fairness like the deepest sea; *you preserve mankind and the animal kingdom.* NET

God provides food for all creatures

Ps 145:15 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Everything looks to you in anticipation, and you provide them with food on a regular basis.* NET

God sends rain on the earth, making it productive

Jer 14:22 [JEREMIAH:] *Do any of the worthless idols of the nations cause rain to fall? Do the skies themselves send showers? Is it not you, O Lord our God, who does this?* So we put our hopes in you because *you alone do all this.* NET

Isa 55:10 *The rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return, but instead water the earth and make it produce and yield crops, and provide seed for the planter and food for those who must eat.* NET

God's provision of rain and food is abundant . . .

Job 36:27–31 *He* [God] *draws up drops of water; they distill the rain into its mist,* [28]*which the clouds pour down and shower on humankind abundantly.* [29]Who can understand the spreading of the clouds, the thunderings of his pavilion? [30]See how he scattered his lightning about him; he has covered the depths of the sea. [31]*It is by these that he judges the nations and supplies food in abundance.* NET

. . . God's provision satisfies his creation

Ps 145:16 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You give them enough and satisfy the needs of all.* GNT

God regulates all aspects of the weather

Job 37:6 For *to the snow he says, 'Fall to earth,' and to the torrential rains, 'Pour down.'* NET

Jer 10:13 *When his voice thunders, the heavenly ocean roars. He makes the clouds rise from the far-off horizons. He makes the lightning flash out in the midst of the rain. He unleashes the wind from the places where he stores it.* NET

The first statement attributes to God thunder and the associated massing of waters in the sky that lead to a storm.

God controls the cycle of day and night

Amos 5:8a The LORD made the stars, the Pleiades and Orion. *He turns darkness into daylight, and day into night.* GNT

God controls the seasons

Gen 8:22 [GOD:] *"While the earth continues to exist, planting time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease."* NET

God's promise that these things will continue is indicative of his control over them.

God regulates and maintains the other aspects of nature

Isa 51:15 *I am the LORD your God, who churns up the sea so that its waves surge.* The LORD who commands armies is his name! NET

Jer 33:25 But I, the LORD, make the following promise: I have made a covenant governing the coming of day and night. *I have established the fixed laws governing heaven and earth.* NET

God has established and also maintains "the fixed laws" of nature that regulate the sky and earth (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT).

Note: God made the earth and all creation to last

Ps 78:69 He made his sanctuary as enduring as the heavens above; as secure as *the earth, which he established permanently.* NET

Ps 148:3–6 *Praise him, O sun and moon! Praise him, all you shiny stars!* [4]*Praise him, O highest heaven, and you waters above the sky!* [5]Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he gave the command and they came into existence. [6]*He established them so they would endure; he issued a decree that will not be revoked.* NET

c) How God Made and Maintains Creation

God made all things with his wisdom

Ps 104:24 *How numerous are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you have made them all*; the earth is filled with your creations. ISV

Prov 3:19–20 *The LORD created the earth by his wisdom; by his knowledge he set the sky in place.* [20]*His wisdom caused the rivers to flow and the clouds to give rain to the earth.* GNT

God made all things with his power

Jer 27:5 [GOD:] *I made the earth and the people and animals on it by my mighty power and great strength*, and I give it to whomever I see fit. NET

God made and maintains all things by his word or command

Ps 33:6, 9 *By the LORD's decree the heavens were made; by a mere word from his mouth all the stars in the sky were created. ...* [9]*For he spoke, and it came into existence, he issued the decree, and it stood firm.* NET

2Pet 3:5b *By the word of God heaven was made, and the earth was made from water and with water.* NCV™

Ps 147:15–18 *He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.* [16]*He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.* [17]*He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs*; who can stand before his cold? [18]*He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.* ESV

This suggests that in addition to creating all things by his command, God continues to control nature (vv. 16–17a, 18b) through his command or word (vv. 15, 18a).

God made and sustains all things through Jesus Christ

John 1:3 *All things were created by him* [Christ], *and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.* NET

Heb 1:2b–3a *He is the one through whom God created the universe*, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. [3]He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, *sustaining the universe with his powerful word.* GNT

The Holy Spirit also has a role in creation

Ps 104:30 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *When you send forth your Spirit, they* [creatures] *are created, and you renew the face of the ground.* ESV

d) Implications of God Being Creator

God is sovereign over all things

Acts 17:24a *The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth.* ISV

Because he has made all things, God has the right of sovereignty over all things. God's almighty power and incomparable wisdom enable him to enforce his sovereignty.

All things belong to God

Ps 24:1–2 *The LORD owns the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live in it.* [2]*For he set its foundation upon the seas, and established it upon the ocean currents.* NET

Verse 2 speaks poetically of God creating the world.

All things exist for God

Rom 11:36 For *all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and for him.* To God be the glory for ever! Amen. GNT

This suggests that because God created and sustains all things, all things exist for him.

Creation attests to God's greatness and glory

Ps 8:3–4 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you established—*[4]*what is man that you take notice of him, or the son of man that you pay attention to him?* ISV

God's wondrous creation prompts David to question why God bothers with humankind, alluding to God's surpassing greatness.

Ps 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky displays his handiwork.* NET

Creation attests to God's power

Isa 40:26 *Look up at the sky! Who created all these heavenly lights? He is the one who leads out their ranks; he calls them all by name. Because of his absolute power and awesome strength, not one of them is missing.* NET

Creation and God's control over it show his power and wisdom to be incomparable

Job 9:4–10 [JOB, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He is wise in heart and mighty in strength – who has resisted him and remained safe?* [5]*He who removes mountains suddenly, who overturns them in his anger;* [6]*he who shakes the earth out of its place so that its pillars tremble;* [7]*he who commands the sun and it does not shine and seals up the stars;* [8]*he alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea;* [9]*he makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the constellations of the southern sky;* [10]*he does great and unsearchable things, and wonderful things without number.* NET

Verse 4 implies that God's wisdom and power is incomparable. Verses 5–10 then illustrate that this is the case, speaking of things that are done by God "alone" (v. 8).

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God's Creation of People

Most would agree that the most significant part of God's creation is his creation of people. God not only gives people life and a spirit, he has made people quite unique amongst all creatures. Furthermore, of all his creatures, it is primarily to people that God reveals himself and relates.

a) Life and Death

God creates people

Ps 119:73 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Your hands made me and formed me.* Give me understanding so that I might learn your commands. NET

Prov 22:2 *The rich and the poor are alike in that the LORD made them all.* NCV™

God creates the various aspects of people's beings

Ps 139:13 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Certainly *you made my mind and heart; you wove me together in my mother's womb.* NET

Prov 20:12 *The ear that hears and the eye that sees – the LORD has made them both.* NET

God gives people life and breath

Acts 17:25b *He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people.* CEV

People's lives are very brief

Ps 39:5–6a [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You made my life short, so brief that the time means nothing to you. "Human life is but a breath, [6]and it disappears like a shadow.* CEV

As many older people would affirm, in a relative sense life is very brief.

Each person is destined to die . . .

Eccl 7:2 It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. For *death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart.* NET

. . . All people die no matter who or what they are

Eccl 9:2 *Everyone shares the same fate – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the ceremonially clean and unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. What happens to the good person, also happens to the sinner; what happens to those who make vows, also happens to those who are afraid to make vows.* NET

Once a person dies, they do not return

Job 7:9–10 *As a cloud is dispersed and then disappears, so the one who goes down to the grave does not come up again. [10]He returns no more to his house, nor does his place of residence know him any more.* NET

Note: Blood signifies life – and a person's life is taken by the shedding of their blood

Gen 9:5–6 [GOD, TO NOAH AND HIS SONS:] And *for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning*: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man *I will require a reckoning for the life of man.* [6]*"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed*, for God made man in his own image. ESV

Blood sustains life (cf. Lev 17:11, 14) and as such it is often used in Scripture to signify life. The correlation between blood and life is shown here by the term "lifeblood" (v. 5) and by the complementary usage of "life" and "blood" in vv. 5b-6a.

b) The Human Spirit

God has made people with a spirit

Zec 12:1b The LORD – he who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, *who forms the human spirit within a person* – says, … NET

The spirit is distinguished from one's body

Matt 26:41 [Jesus, to his disciples:] Stay awake and pray for strength against temptation. *The spirit wants to do what is right, but the body is weak.* NCV™

The spirit and the soul are closely associated

Job 7:11 [Job:] Therefore, I will not refrain my mouth; *I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.* NET

> Note that some commentators caution against attempting to make categorical distinctions between the spirit and the soul. Having said this, "spirit" is typically used when speaking of the will and thoughts, whereas "soul" is more prominent when speaking of emotions and desires or of the person themselves.

The spirit and soul are at the core of one's being

Prov 20:27 *A person's spirit* is the lamp of the Lord; *it searches through all of one's innermost being.* ISV

Lam 3:20 [Jeremiah:] *My soul* continually remembers it and *is bowed down within me.* ESV

The spirit and soul are linked with one's emotions

See also:

- Lam 3:20 ⇧

Eccl 7:9 *Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,* for anger lodges in the bosom of fools. ESV

Job 30:25 [Job:] Have I not wept for him who was in trouble? *Has not my soul grieved for the poor?* NKJV

The spirit and soul are linked with one's desires

Isa 26:9a [Isaiah, to God:] *My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.* ESV

The spirit is involved in one's thinking

Ps 77:6–7 [A psalmist:] I remember my song in the night and reflect on it. *My spirit searches for an answer: [7]Will the Lord reject me for all time? Will he ever accept me?* GW

1Cor 2:11a Who knows the thoughts that another person has? Only *a person's spirit that lives within him knows his thoughts.* NCV™

The spirit is fundamental to one's attitude and actions

Prov 18:14 *A person's spirit sustains him through sickness – but who can bear a crushed spirit?* NET

Job 32:18 [Elihu:] I am full of words, and *the spirit in me causes me to speak.* NCV™

People are dead without their spirit

James 2:26 For just as *the body without the spirit is dead,* so also faith without works is dead. NET

People's spirits and souls exist after death

Acts 7:59 *They* [Jews] *continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"* NET

Rev 6:9–10 [John, describing a vision of a scene in heaven:] Now when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar *the souls of those who had been violently killed* because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given. [10]They cried out with a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?" NET

> Here John is recounting a vision involving believers in heaven, who had died.

c) The Uniqueness of People

God has made people in his own image

Gen 1:26–27 *Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness,* so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the

earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." [27]*God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them*, male and female he created them. NET

That God has made people in his own image is evident in that they reflect such things as his personal traits – e.g. aspects of his character and intellect – and that they have a spirit (as discussed in the previous subsection). Additionally, it is noteworthy that although God essentially is spirit, some descriptions of God speak of him in terms of a discernible human-like form (cf. Ezek 1:26–28; Dan 7:9).

People have an able mind, with which to think and reason intelligently

Job 38:36 Who has *put wisdom in the heart*, or has *imparted understanding to the mind*? NET

God has given people a mind with the ability to understand things.

Acts 17:2–3 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days *he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,* [3]*explaining and proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." ESV

People have the moral capacity to know good from evil . . .

Gen 3:22 And the LORD God said, "Now that *the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil*, he must not be allowed to stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." NET

. . . People can choose between good and evil

Ps 37:27a [DAVID, EXHORTING HIS LISTENERS:] *Turn away from evil! Do what is right!* NET

Isa 7:15 He will be eating milk curds and honey when *he learns to reject what is evil and to choose what is good*. NCV™

Note that this tells of a coming child, understood by many people to be ultimately speaking of the Messiah (cf. v. 14; Matt. 1:21–23).

People are of much more value than other creatures

Matt 10:31 So do not be afraid; *you are more valuable than many sparrows*. NET

Matt 12:12a *How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!* NET

God has made people ruler over all other creatures

Ps 8:6–8 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You appointed them* [people] *rulers over everything you made; you placed them over all creation:* [7]*sheep and cattle, and the wild animals too;* [8]*the birds and the fish and the creatures in the seas.* GNT

People are to care for other creatures

Prov 12:10 *A righteous person cares for the life of his animal*, but even the most compassionate acts of the wicked are cruel. NET

People are to act responsibly towards all creation

Hab 2:17a [GOD, TO THE BABYLONIANS:] For *you will pay in full for your violent acts against Lebanon; terrifying judgment will come upon you because of the way you destroyed the wild animals living there*. NET

The Babylonians' desolation of the forests of Lebanon (cf. CEV, GNT, NLT) and their destruction of animals contravened humankind's responsibility towards nature – and they would be punished for it.

d) Epilogue: God's Self-Revelation to People

See also:

- *b) God's Communication of His Word*, p. 76
- *d) God's Judgment Reveals God*, p. 102

▪ *e) God Is Revealed in Saving His People*, p. 201

People cannot in themselves perceive or know God

Job 37:23 [ELIHU:] *The Almighty—we cannot find him*; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. ESV

1Cor 1:21a For *God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know him by means of their own wisdom*. GNT

God reveals himself

1Sam 2:27 A man of God came to Eli and said to him, *"This is what the LORD says: 'Did I not plainly reveal myself to your ancestor's house when they were in Egypt* in the house of Pharaoh? NET

1Sam 3:21 Then the LORD again appeared in Shiloh, for it was in Shiloh that *the LORD had revealed himself to Samuel through the word of the LORD*. NET

God reveals himself by what he does

Ezek 20:9 [GOD:] I acted for the sake of my reputation, so that I would not be profaned before *the nations among whom they lived, before whom I revealed myself by bringing them out of the land of Egypt*. NET

> By delivering the Israelites out of Egypt, God revealed himself to the surrounding peoples.

God's creation perpetually evidences and reveals God to all people . . .

Rom 1:19–20 [PAUL, REFERRING TO WICKED PEOPLE:] For *what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* [20]*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.* So they are without excuse. ESV

. . . God's ongoing control over nature likewise testifies to him

Acts 14:17 But *he has always given evidence of his existence by the good things he does: he gives you rain from heaven and crops at the right times; he gives you food and fills your hearts with happiness.* GNT

> God's provision through his regulation of nature is evidence to people of his existence and reveals his goodness.

God is revealed in his acts of judgment and of salvation

Ezek 35:11b [GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF EDOM:] I will deal with you according to your anger, and according to your envy, by which you acted spitefully against them [Israel and Judah]. *I will reveal myself to them when I judge you.* NET

Ps 106:8 Yet *he* [God] *saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.* ESV

God is revealed and known through Jesus Christ

See also:

▪ *Jesus Christ is the image of God*, p. 28
▪ *Jesus Christ has the form and fullness of God – equality in nature*, p. 28
▪ *To know or see Jesus Christ is to know or see the Father*, p. 29
▪ *Jesus came to enable us to know God*, p. 119

John 17:6a [JESUS, PRAYING TO GOD:] *I have made you known to those you gave me out of the world.* GNT

1Jn 5:20 And we know that *the Son of God has come and has given us insight to know him who is true,* and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life. NET

Note: God reveals his plans and will

Amos 3:7 Certainly *the sovereign LORD does nothing without first revealing his plan to his servants the prophets*. NET

Acts 22:14 He [Ananias, addressing Saul] said, ‘*The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will,* to see his righteous Servant, and to hear him speaking with his own voice. GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 7

God’s Sovereignty

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I. God's Supreme Authority

As the one and only God, God reigns supreme in the world. He has supreme power over all things. As such, God defeats his enemies and he fulfills his plans. A realization of this produces submission to and worship of the one and only God.

a) The LORD Is God – the Only God

Note that God stated that the "LORD" was the name by which he was to be known (cf. Ex 3:12–15).

The Lord is God

Ps 100:3a *Know that the LORD is God.* NCV™

2Sam 7:28a Now, *O sovereign LORD, you are the true God!* NET

The Lord is God of heaven and earth

Deut 4:39 Today realize and carefully consider that *the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth below* – there is no other! NET

The Lord is God of all people

Jer 32:27a *I am the LORD, the God of all humankind.* NET

2Ki 19:15a Hezekiah prayed before the LORD: "LORD God of Israel, who is enthroned on the cherubs! *You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.* NET

The Lord is the true and living God . . .

Jer 10:10 *The LORD is the only true God. He is the living God* and the everlasting King. When he shows his anger the earth shakes. None of the nations can stand up to his fury. NET

. . . He is the one and only God

Isa 45:21b–22 [GOD:] And *there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.* [22]"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! *For I am God, and there is no other.* ESV

God's deeds show that he is the only God

Ps 86:10 [DAVID:] For *you are great and do amazing things. You alone are God.* NET

Deut 32:39 [GOD:] *See, I am the only God. There are no others. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal, and no one can rescue you from my power.* GW

b) God Reigns Supreme

God reigns

Ps 96:10 *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!* The world is established, it cannot be moved. He judges the nations fairly." NET

God rules over all – over all the earth

1Chr 29:11–12 O LORD, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and *sovereign over all the sky and earth! You have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all.* [12]You are the source of wealth and honor; *you rule over all*. You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all. NET

Ps 47:2 For the sovereign LORD is awe–inspiring; *he is the great king who rules the whole earth!* NET

God rules over all nations and authorities

Ps 22:28 For *the LORD is king and rules over the nations.* NET

1Tim 6:15a The glorious God is the only Ruler, *the King of kings and Lord of lords.* CEV

God will reign forever

Lam 5:19 But *you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.* NET

God will impose his absolute rule on all

Rev 11:15–17 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying: *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and*

ever." [16]Then the twenty–four elders who are seated on their thrones before God threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and worshiped God [17]with these words: "We give you thanks, Lord God, the All–Powerful, the one who is and who was, because *you have taken your great power and begun to reign.* NET

The proclamation in v. 15 and the final phrase "have begun to reign" (v. 17) may mean that at this point God has begun to impose his rule on all – the actualization of the kingdom (v. 15) implemented with the imposition of God's great power (v. 17). Alternatively the past tense may be used here to indicate the certainty of God doing so in the future.

Note: All things belong to God

1Chr 29:11a Greatness, power, splendor, glory, and majesty are yours, LORD, because *everything in heaven and on earth is yours*. GW

All things belong to God – as he made all things – and it is because of this that God has the right to his sovereignty over all things.

c) God Has Power over All Things

See also:

- *b) God's Power (I): Ultimate Power*, p. 10

God has power over the forces of evil

Col 2:15 *God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.* NCV™

Rom 16:20a [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet.* NET

God has power over death, to raise the dead

2Cor 1:9 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF HIS TRIALS:] Indeed we felt as if the sentence of death had been passed against us, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in *God who raises the dead*. NET

God has power over all aspects of nature, including: the earth; the skies; . . .

Job 9:5–7 *Without warning he moves mountains and in anger he destroys them.* [6]*God sends earthquakes and shakes the ground; he rocks the pillars that support the earth.* [7]*He can keep the sun from rising, and the stars from shining at night.* GNT

. . . and the waters

Ps 107:24–25, 29 They witnessed *the acts of the LORD, his amazing feats on the deep water.* [25]*He gave the order for a windstorm, and it stirred up the waves of the sea. …* [29]*He calmed the storm, and the waves grew silent.* NET

God has power over nations . . .

Dan 4:35 *All who live on the earth are nothing compared to him. He does what he wishes with the heavenly armies and with those who live on earth. No one can hold back his power or say to him, 'What did you do?'* ISV

Hab 3:6, 12 *He* [God] *takes his battle position and shakes the earth; with a mere look he frightens the nations.* The ancient mountains disintegrate; the primeval hills are flattened. He travels on the ancient roads. … [12]*You* [God] *furiously stomp on the earth, you angrily trample down the nations.* NET

This poetically portrays God's vastly superior power over nations.

. . . God can destroy nations

Zeph 3:6 [GOD:] *I destroyed nations; their walled cities are in ruins. I turned their streets into ruins; no one passes through them. Their cities are desolate; no one lives there.* NET

Hag 2:22a [GOD:] *I will overthrow royal thrones and shatter the might of earthly kingdoms.* NET

God has power over rulers and can bring them down

Isa 40:23 *He brings down powerful rulers and reduces them to nothing.* GNT

d) God Defeats His Enemies

No one can effectively oppose God . . .

Job 23:13 But *he alone is God, and who can oppose him? God does as he pleases, ...* CEV

Jer 49:19b [GOD:] For *there is no one like me, and there is no one who can call me to account. There is no ruler who can stand up against me.* NET

. . . The plans of God's enemies cannot succeed against him

Ps 21:11 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Though they plan evil against you, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed.* ESV

Prov 21:30 *There is no wisdom, understanding, or advice that can succeed against the LORD.* NCV™

God takes vengeance on his enemies

Nah 1:2 The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; *the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.* ESV

God repays his enemies for their deeds

Isa 59:18 *The LORD will pay back his enemies for what they have done. He will show his anger to those who were against him; he will punish the people in faraway places as they deserve.* NCV™

God destroys his enemies

Deut 7:10 But *he will pay back those people who hate him. He will destroy them, and he will not be slow to pay back those who hate him.* NCV™

1Sam 2:10a *The LORD shatters his adversaries; he thunders against them from the heavens. The LORD executes judgment to the ends of the earth.* NET

e) God Fulfills His Plans

God carries out his plans

Isa 14:24 The LORD who commands armies makes this solemn vow: *"Be sure of this: Just as I have intended, so it will be; just as I have planned, it will happen.* NET

God's plans, which he fulfills, were determined long ago – from the beginning

Isa 25:1 [ISAIAH:] O LORD, you are my God! I will exalt you in praise, I will extol your fame. For *you have done extraordinary things, and executed plans made long ago* exactly as you decreed. NET

Isa 46:10 [GOD:] *From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened, saying, "My plan will stand, and I'll do everything I intended to do."* GW

When the time comes, God's plans are promptly fulfilled

Hab 2:3 [GOD, TO HABAKKUK:] For still *the vision awaits its appointed time*; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. *If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.* ESV

The reference is to the fulfillment of a prophetic vision from God.

God does not change his plans . . .

Num 23:19 God is not a human being, and he will not lie. He is not a human, and *he does not change his mind. What he says he will do, he does. What he promises, he makes come true.* NCV™

. . . though God may have reason to relent from something he proposed

Isa 38:1–5 In those days Hezekiah was stricken with a terminal illness. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz visited him and told him, *"This is what the LORD says, 'Give instructions to your household, for you are about to die; you will not get well.'"* [2]*Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,* [3]*"Please, LORD. Remember how I have served you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion, and how I have carried out your will." Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.* [4]The LORD told

Isaiah, [5]"Go and tell Hezekiah: *'This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add fifteen years to your life, …* NET

No one can thwart God's plans . . .

Isa 14:27 Indeed, *the LORD who commands armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it?* NET

. . . Nor can anyone alter what God does

Eccl 3:14 [A WISE TEACHER:] I also know that *whatever God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it.* God has made it this way, so that men will fear him. NET

Note that in such general usage, "men" contextually is intended to be inclusive of women.

God works everything for his plans

Prov 16:4 *The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.* ESV

Eph 1:11 In him [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of *him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, …* ESV

These verses appear to indicate that God works all things that exist or occur for the fulfillment of his plans.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God's Control over the World

God has power over everything. This includes control over evil powers, nature, the nations of the world and each person's life. Comprehending this is vital to having a sound understanding of God and of his relationship to the world – including his relationship with ourselves.

a) God Has Control over Evil

See also:

- *S*, p. 48

God exerts control over evil

Gen 31:7 [JACOB, REFERRING TO HIS GREEDY UNCLE LABAN:] Yet he has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. *But God did not let him harm me.* GNT

1Cor 10:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] No temptation has overtaken you that is unusual for human beings. *But God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. Instead, along with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it.* ISV

God has control over and limits any temptation, whether it originates from Satan or from our own sinful nature. This is indicative of God's control over evil.

God can even use evil

1Sam 18:10a *The next day an evil spirit from God suddenly took control of Saul, and he raved in his house like a madman.* GNT

It would appear that the evil spirit was sent by God as a punishment for disobedient King Saul.

God can use evil to fulfill his plans and purposes

Acts 2:23 [PETER, TO A CROWD LARGELY OF JEWS:] *Jesus was given to you, and with the help of those who don't know the law, you put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But this was God's plan which he had made long ago*; he knew all this would happen. NCV™

Rev 17:17 For *God has put into their minds to carry out his purpose by making a decision to give their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled*. NET

This speaks of kings or world powers of the end times cooperating with the beast or anti-Christ, to unwittingly accomplish God's purpose.

God may use evil and wrongdoing to punish

Isa 10:5–7 God says, "How terrible it will be for *the king of Assyria. I use him like a rod to show my anger; in anger I use Assyria like a club.* 6 *I send it to fight against a nation that is separated from God. I am angry with those people, so I command Assyria to fight against them, to take their wealth from them, to trample them down like dirt in the streets.* 7 *But Assyria's king doesn't understand that I am using him; he doesn't know he is a tool for me. He only wants to destroy other people and to defeat many nations.* NCV™

Verse 7 shows the Assyrian king to have been wicked. Despite this God used him to punish the godlessness of other nations (vv. 5–6).

God may even use evil for the benefit of people

Gen 50:20 [JOSEPH, TO HIS BROTHERS:] *As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.* NET

2Cor 12:7–9 [PAUL:] *To keep me from becoming conceited because of the exceptional nature of these revelations, a thorn was given to me and placed in my body. It was Satan's messenger to keep on tormenting me so that I would not become conceited.* 8 I pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from me, 9 but he has told me, "My grace is all you need, for *my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most*

happily boast about my weaknesses, so that the Messiah's power may rest on me. ISV

God – or Christ – used Paul's affliction, which apparently came from Satan, to both keep him from becoming conceited (v. 7) and make him receptive to Christ's power working in him (v. 9).

b) God Has Control over Nature

See also:

- *b) God Maintains Creation*, p. 55
- *G*, p. 65
- ., p. 65

God directs nature

Job 37:11–12 *He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through the clouds.* [12]*The clouds go round in circles, wheeling about according to his plans, to carry out all that he commands them over the face of the whole inhabited world.* NET

Ps 147:15–18 *He sends his command through the earth; swiftly his order reaches its destination.* [16]*He sends the snow that is white like wool; he spreads the frost that is white like ashes.* [17]*He throws his hailstones like crumbs.* Who can withstand *the cold wind he sends?* [18]*He then orders it all to melt; he breathes on it, and the water flows.* NET

Nature serves God

Ps 104:4 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *The winds are your messengers, and flames of fire are your servants.* CEV

The term "flames of fire" refers to lightning.

Ps 119:91 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] To this day they stand by means of your rulings, for *all things serve you.* ISV

God can control the elements of nature to bring plentiful provision . . .

Joel 2:23b–24 Citizens of Zion [Jerusalem], rejoice! Be glad because of what the LORD your God has done! For *he has given to you the early rains as vindication. He has sent to you the rains – both the early and the late rains as formerly.* [24]*The threshing floors are full of grain; the vats overflow with fresh wine and olive oil.* NET

. . . and God can control nature so as to bring depravation

Hag 1:10–11 [GOD, TO HIS SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE:] This is why *the sky has held back its dew and the earth its produce.* [11]*Moreover, I have called for a drought that will affect the fields, the hill country, the grain, new wine, fresh olive oil, and everything that grows from the ground; it also will harm people, animals, and everything they produce.* NET

God has control over all creatures

Jer 27:6 [GOD, TO VARIOUS KINGS:] I have at this time placed all these nations of yours under the power of my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. *I have even made all the wild animals subject to him.* NET

Gen 7:15–16a *Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life came into the ark to Noah.* [16]*Those that entered were male and female*, just as God commanded him. NET

God caused two of every kind of creature to come to Noah, as God had said (cf. 6:19–20).

God can even perform miracles of nature

Judg 13:3, 24a *The LORD's angelic messenger appeared to the woman and said to her, "You are infertile and childless, but you will conceive and have a son. ...* [24]*Manoah's wife gave birth to a son* and named him Samson. NET

1Ki 17:12–16 She [a widow] said, "As certainly as the LORD your God lives, I have no food, except for a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. Right now I am gathering a couple of sticks for a fire. Then I'm going home to make one final meal for my son and myself. After we have eaten that, we will die of starvation." [13]Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go and do as you planned. But first make a small cake for me and bring it to me; then make something for yourself and your son. [14]*For this is what the LORD God of Israel says, 'The jar of flour will not be empty and the jug of oil will not run out until the day the LORD makes it rain on the surface of the ground.'"* [15]*She went and did as Elijah told her;*

there was always enough food for Elijah and for her and her family. [16]*The jar of flour was never empty and the jug of oil never ran out, just as the* LORD *had promised through Elijah.* NET

c) God Has Control over the Nations

God is in control of the nations

Ps 67:4 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Let foreigners rejoice and celebrate! For *you execute justice among the nations, and govern the people living on earth*. (Selah) NET

Isa 14:26–27 [GOD:] *This is the plan I have devised for the whole earth; my hand is ready to strike all the nations."* [Isaiah:] [27]*Indeed, the* LORD *who commands armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it?* NET

> What God determines for the whole world does take place, for God "controls every nation" (CEV) – none can prevent him from implementing his purposes concerning them.

God has been in control of the nations throughout history

Acts 17:26 *From one human being he created all races on earth and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed beforehand the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live.* GNT

God appoints times for events affecting the nations

Ps 75:2 God says, *"At the appointed times, I judge fairly.* NET

> God's judgment spoken of here may well primarily be judgment on the nations (cf. v. 3); it is at least inclusive of this. As such the verse speaks of God choosing the times for his judgments of nations – presumably primarily the times of their downfall.

Dan 11:27–29 The two kings will both plan to do evil. They will sit at the same table and tell lies. But they will not succeed, because *the end must wait until the appointed time*. [28]The northern king will return to his country with a lot of wealth. He will be determined to fight against the holy promise. He will take action and return to his own country. [29]*"At the appointed time he will again invade the south*, but this time will be different from the first. GW

> The kings referred to here are Ptolemy Philometor of Egypt and Antiochus IV Epiphanes, with the events concerned eventuating around 170–168 B.C. In v. 27, "the end" seems to be speaking of the end of Antiochus' plans to expand his dominion into Egypt.

God has control over the outcome of conflicts between nations

Prov 21:31 *You can get the horses ready for battle, but it is the* LORD *who gives the victory.* NCV™

God can thwart the plans of the nations

Ps 33:10 *The* LORD *frustrates the decisions of the nations; he nullifies the plans of the peoples.* NET

God establishes all ruling authorities

Rom 13:1 Let every person be subject to *the governing authorities*. For *there is no authority except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God*. NET

God has control over rulers . . .

Prov 21:1 *The* LORD *can control a king's mind as he controls a river; he can direct it as he pleases.* NCV™

. . . God can use rulers in order to accomplish his purposes

2Chr 36:22–23 In the first year that Cyrus of Persia was emperor, *the* LORD *made what he had said through the prophet Jeremiah come true. He prompted Cyrus to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his empire*: [23]"This is the command of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia. *The* LORD*, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler over the whole world and has given me the responsibility of building a temple for him in Jerusalem in Judah. Now, all of you who are God's people, go there, and may the* LORD *your God be with you."* GNT

d) God Has Control over Each Person

God has control over people's hearts and minds

1Sam 10:9a When Saul turned to leave Samuel, *God changed Saul's heart.* NCV™

Ex 12:36 *The LORD caused the Egyptians to think well of them,* and the Egyptians gave the people everything they asked for. So the Israelites took rich gifts from them. NCV™

God has control over people's actions . . .

Dan 5:23b [DANIEL, TO KING BELSHAZZAR:] But you have not glorified the *God who has in his control your very breath and all your ways!* NET

Eccl 9:1a [A WISE TEACHER:] In light of all of this, I committed myself to explain it this way: *the righteous and the wise, along with everything they do, are in the hands of God.* ISV

God has control over (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV) that which is said to be in his "hands". Here this would encompass what the righteous actually do, along with the success and effect of these deeds.

. . . Despite people's plans, their steps are directed by God

Prov 16:9 *A person plans his course, but the LORD directs his steps.* NET

God controls the good and bad things that happen to people

Lam 3:38 *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that everything comes – both calamity and blessing?* NET

Eccl 7:14 *In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other,* so that no one can discover what the future holds. NET

God determines the length of people's lives . . .

Job 14:5 [JOB, TO GOD:] Since *man's days are determined, the number of his months is under your control; you have set his limit and he cannot pass it.* NET

Ps 139:16b [DAVID, TO GOD:] *All the days ordained for me were recorded in your scroll before one of them came into existence.* NET

. . . and God finishes people's lives

Ps 90:3, 5a [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *At your command we die and turn back to dust, ...* [5]*You bring our lives to an end just like a dream.* CEV

Note: The life of every person is in God's hands

Job 12:10 *The life of every living creature and the spirit in every human body are in his hands.* GW

e) Addendum: God's Early Dealings with Humankind

From the time he created the first people, God has ruled over them, exerting his authority and control when necessary – as evidenced throughout this section.

God's creation of the first people, in an ideal environment

Gen 2:7–10a *Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the earth and blew the breath of life into his nostrils. The man became a living being.* [8]*The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east. That's where he put the man whom he had formed.* [9]*The LORD God made all the trees grow out of the ground. These trees were nice to look at, and their fruit was good to eat. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil grew in the middle of the garden.* [10]*A river flowed from Eden to water the garden.* GW

Gen 2:22–23 *Then the LORD God formed a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man. He brought her to the man.* [23]*The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be named woman because she was taken from man."* GW

The man and the woman are of course Adam and Eve, who also are in view in the following subsection.

Humankind's original sin . . .

Gen 3:2–6 And the woman [Eve] said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3]*but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"* [4]But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5]For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6]So *when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* ESV

Note that generally Satan is understood to be behind the serpent's action, speaking through the serpent.

. . . The judgment for sin – including death and expulsion from the Garden of Eden

Gen 3:22–23 Then the LORD God said, "The man has become like one of us, since he knows good and evil. *He must not reach out and take the fruit from the tree of life and eat. Then he would live forever."* [23]*So the LORD God sent the man out of the Garden of Eden to farm the ground from which the man had been formed.* GW

Verse 22 effectively speaks of the punishment of death (cf. v. 3), with people no longer able to eat from the tree of life and live forever.

The flood and Noah: Escalated sin and judgment; righteousness and salvation

Gen 6:12–14, 17–19 *God saw the earth, and indeed it was ruined, for all living creatures on the earth were sinful.* [13]*So God said to Noah, "I have decided that all living creatures must die, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Now I am about to destroy them and the earth.* [14]*Make for yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it with pitch inside and out. …* [17]*I am about to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy from under the sky all the living creatures that have the breath of life in them. Everything that is on the earth will die,* [18]*but I will confirm my covenant with you. You will enter the ark* – you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. [19]*You must bring into the ark two of every kind of living creature from all flesh, male and female, to keep them alive with you.* NET

Gen 7:1, 23 *The LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ship with your whole family because I have seen that you alone are righteous among the people of today. …* [23]*Every living creature on the face of the earth was wiped out. Humans, domestic animals, crawling creatures, and birds were wiped off the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ship were left.* GW

The Tower of Babel: Sinful pride and the dispersion of humankind

Gen 11:1–9 The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary. [2]When the people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. [3]Then they said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." (They had brick instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.) [4]*Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves.* Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth." [5]But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had started building. [6]*And the LORD said, "If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them.* [7]*Come, let's go down and confuse their language so they won't be able to understand each other."* [8]*So the LORD scattered them from there across the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city.* [9]*That is why its name was called Babel – because there the LORD confused the language of the entire world, and from there the LORD scattered them across the face of the entire earth.* NET

Verse 4 suggests that human pride was behind the building of this tower, known as the Tower of Babel. With the people's pride fuelling their aspirations and accomplishments, God would have foreseen the potential for self-reliance and rebellion against him. As such God confused their language (v. 7), so that they did not speak the same language (v. 6). Moreover – in direct contrast to the people's second objective for the tower (v. 4b) – God scattered them throughout the earth (v. 9b).

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 8

God’s Word

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I. General

God's word is our window to God. For through it we learn about God and his relationship with us. Moreover, its unique characteristics and functions have the imprint of God.

a) What God's Word Comprises

God's word primarily is Scripture

John 10:35 If he [God] called them gods to whom *the word of God* came—and *Scripture* cannot be broken— … ESV

This speaks of Scripture as "the word of God".

2Tim 3:16a *Every Scripture passage is inspired by God.* GW

Here Paul is effectively saying that every verse of Scripture comes from God, i.e. Scripture "is God's Word" (CEV).

God's word includes his laws

Ps 147:19 [A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD:] *He speaks his word to Jacob, his laws and judicial decisions to Israel.* GW

God's word includes his covenants

Ex 34:27, 28b *The LORD said to Moses, "Write these words down, because it is on the basis of these words that I am making a covenant* with you and with Israel." [28]… He wrote on the tablets *the words of the covenant*—the Ten Commandments. GNT

This speaks of words of God forming God's covenant with Israel.

God's word includes his promises

2Sam 7:28 [DAVID:] Now, O sovereign LORD, you are the true God! *May your words prove to be true! You have made this good promise to your servant!* NET

God's word includes his prophecies

Jer 36:2 [GOD, TO JEREMIAH:] *Get a scroll. Write on it everything I have told you to say about Israel, Judah, and all the other nations since I began to speak to you in the reign of Josiah until now.* NET

Here Jeremiah is told to write down prophecies spoken by God regarding the future of nations. Daniel 9:2b below tells of the prophecy in God's word that Israel's exile would last 70 years.

Dan 9:2b I, *Daniel, noted in the Scripture the total years that were assigned by the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem: 70 years.* ISV

God's word also includes the gospel, proclaimed by his people

Acts 13:5a When they [Barnabas and Saul] arrived in Salamis, *they began to proclaim the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.* NET

This reference to God's word is clearly speaking of the gospel message.

Note: Jesus Christ is the Word of God

Rev 19:13 [John, describing a vision of Christ] He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and *he is called the Word of God.* NET

Jesus Christ is called the "Word of God" in part because much of what God says and does, he says and does through Jesus Christ.

b) God's Communication of His Word

Note that the last two subsections in the preceding section are also pertinent to this section.

God has given his word by the Holy Spirit

2Pet 1:20–21 Above all, you do well if you recognize this: *No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination,* [21]*for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.* NET

God gave his law through Moses

John 1:17 *God gave the Law through Moses*, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. GNT

God has spoken through prophets

Heb 1:1 In the past *God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times and in many different ways*. NCV™

God has spoken through visions and dreams

Mic 1:1 During the time that Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah, *the word of the LORD came to Micah, who was from Moresheth. He saw these visions about Samaria and Jerusalem.* NCV™

Job 33:14–16 *For God speaks*, the first time in one way, the second time in another, though a person does not perceive it. [15]*In a dream, a night vision, when deep sleep falls on people as they sleep in their beds.* [16]*Then he gives a revelation to people, and terrifies them with warnings, …* NET

God's word was spoken by Jesus Christ

Luke 5:1 Now Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, and *the crowd was pressing around him to hear the word of God*. NET

John 3:34 For *the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God*, for he does not give the Spirit sparingly. NET

> Note that the last clause probably means that God gave to Jesus Christ the Spirit without any limit (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT).

c) Characteristics of God's Word

God's word is holy, righteous and good

Rom 7:12 So then, *the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good*. NET

God's word is true . . .

Ps 33:4 *The words of the LORD are true* and all his works are dependable. GNT

John 17:17 [JESUS, TO GOD:] Set them apart in the truth; *your word is truth*. NET

. . . and what God's word foretells comes true

Lam 2:17 [JEREMIAH TO JERUSALEM'S PEOPLE:] *The LORD has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his promise that he threatened long ago*: He has overthrown you without mercy and has enabled the enemy to gloat over you; he has exalted your adversaries' power. NET

God's word is living and active

Heb 4:12a For *the word of God is living and active …* NET

> Two reasons for describing God's word as "living" are that it never ceases to be pertinent and it keeps on influencing and affecting people. The latter reason also shows it to be active.

God's word is powerful

Heb 4:12 *What God has said* isn't only alive and active! *It is sharper than any double-edged sword. His word can cut through our spirits and souls and through our joints and marrow, until it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts.* CEV

> God's word can penetrate to the very depths of our inner-selves, exposing our thoughts and attitudes for what they really are.

God's word is everlasting

1Pet 1:24–25 For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off, [25]but *the word of the Lord endures forever*. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you. NET

Note: God's word surpasses everything of this world

Ps 138:2 [DAVID, TO GOD:] I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for *you have exalted above all things your name and your word.* ESV

d) Functions of God's Word (I): General

God's word makes known his commands

Isa 1:10 [Isaiah, to Jerusalem's people:] *Hear the word of the Lord*, You rulers of Sodom; *Give ear to the law of our God*, You people of Gomorrah: … NKJV

The proclamation of God's word makes known his law with its commands, as God's law/commands are a key component of his word.

God's word makes known his plans

Isa 38:4–6 *Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah:* 5*"Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord*, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, *I will add fifteen years to your life.* 6*I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.* ESV

God's word plays a role in salvation

1Cor 15:1–2 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, *the gospel that I preached to you*, that you received and on which you stand, 2and *by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you* – unless you believed in vain. NET

2Tim 3:15 [Paul, to Timothy:] From infancy you have known *the Holy Scriptures that are able to give you the wisdom you need for salvation* through faith in the Messiah Jesus. ISV

God's word plays a role in sanctification

John 17:17 [Jesus, to God:] *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* NKJV

Here Jesus effectively prays that God would sanctify his people by his word. Note that sanctification refers to the process in which believers are made holy. This is primarily achieved through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death. Additionally, believers are continually being transformed by God, becoming more like Jesus Christ and increasingly devoid of sin.

God's word helps people avoid sin

Ps 119:9, 11 [A psalmist, to God:] *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. …* 11*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* ESV

God's word helps people learn to fear God

Deut 31:13 [Moses, to the Israelites:] Their children, who don't know *these teachings, must hear them and learn to fear the Lord your God* as long as you live in the land that you are going to take possession of when you cross the Jordan River. GW

God's word encourages people

Rom 15:4 [Paul, to believers:] For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through *the encouragement of the Scriptures* we might have hope. ESV

Note: God acts by his word

Ps 147:15–18 *He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.* 16*He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.* 17*He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold?* 18*He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.* ESV

Isa 55:11 [God:] *My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. It will not come back to me without results. It will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do.* GW

The references to God's "word" in the above verses are essentially speaking of his command. These verses imply that God merely needs to command things to be done for them to happen.

e) Functions of God's Word (II): Blessings

Life . . .

Deut 8:3 [Moses, to the Israelites:] And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that *man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*. ESV

The supernatural provision of manna by God through his command or word, demonstrated that it is God's word which is the ultimate source of life's sustenance – a truth with application to both physical and spiritual life.

. . . notably, spiritual and eternal life

John 6:63, 68 [Jesus:] The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* ... [68]Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? *You have the words of eternal life.* NET

In v. 63b Jesus appears to be saying that his words are spiritual, producing spiritual or eternal life. Jesus seems to be implying that it is by the Holy Spirit (v. 63a) that his words produce this life.

Light

Ps 119:105 [A psalmist, to God:] *Your word is a lamp to walk by, and a light to illumine my path.* NET

God's word gives "light" in that it gives insight, as reflected in the following pair of subsections. Also bear in mind that God's word also gives "light" in the sense that it leads to well-being or salvation, turning the darkness of one's circumstances to light.

Knowledge

Isa 51:7a [God:] Listen to me, *you who know what is right, you people who are aware of my law*! NET

God's word, here in particular his law, gives knowledge of what is right.

Wisdom

Ps 119:98–100, 104 [A psalmist, to God:] *Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for I am always aware of them.* [99]*I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your rules.* [100]*I am more discerning than those older than I, for I observe your precepts.* ... [104]*Your precepts give me discernment.* Therefore I hate all deceitful actions. NET

Hope

Ps 119:49 [A psalmist, to God:] *Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.* NET

God had given the psalmist hope by his word, or promise (cf. AMP, CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT).

Joy

Ps 19:8a *The Lord's precepts are fair and make one joyful*. NET

Freedom

Ps 119:45 [A psalmist, to God:] *I have gained perfect freedom by following your teachings*, ... CEV

The psalmist had freedom from things that ordinarily confine or burden a person. Possibly sin and its effects are in view (cf. John 8:31–32), but in the context it is more likely the burdens and oppression that hard times often bring.

John 8:31–32 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *"If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples* [32]*and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* NET

This is probably primarily referring to freedom from sin, but freedom from bondage to the law may also be in view.

Note: Rejecting God's word brings his judgment

Jer 6:19 [God:] Hear, O earth; behold, *I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it.* ESV

John 12:48 [Jesus:] *The one who rejects me and does not accept my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him at the last day.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Key Old Testament Covenants

A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties. As indicated earlier, God's covenants are a key aspect of his word – along with his commands, prophecies and promises.

God's covenants with people were all initiated by God. They generally confirmed his relationship with the persons concerned – who were or who became his people. The covenants included binding promises by God of blessings for his people, reflecting his purposes for them. In some cases God's covenants also outlined what God required of his people and how they were to relate to him.

God's covenants with Abraham, Israel and David are prime instances of the role of God's word. They expound pivotal promises and (in the covenant with Israel) laws of God. They also form the background of God's relationship with his people today. Learning about them enables us to better understand the significance of much of the NT's teachings.

a) God's Covenant with Abraham

God called Abraham to go to the land of Canaan – and Abraham went

Gen 12:1, 4–5 *The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land I will show you. ... [4]So Abram left Haran as the LORD had told him,* and Lot went with him. At this time Abram was 75 years old. [5]*He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and everything they owned, as well as all the servants they had gotten in Haran. They set out from Haran, planning to go to the land of Canaan, and in time they arrived there.* NCV™

Note that Abraham's name was initially "Abram". God later changed it to "Abraham" (cf. 17:5 ⇩).

Subsequently, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him: countless descendants; the land of Canaan; . . .

Gen 17:3–8 Abram bowed down with his face to the ground, and *God said to him, [4]"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of a multitude of nations. [5]No longer will your name be Abram. Instead, your name will be Abraham because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. [6]I will make you extremely fruitful. I will make nations of you, and kings will descend from you. [7]I will confirm my covenant as a perpetual covenant between me and you. It will extend to your descendants after you throughout their generations. I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you. [8]I will give the whole land of Canaan – the land where you are now residing – to you and your descendants after you as a permanent possession. I will be their God."* NET

God made an everlasting covenant with the Israelite's ancestor Abraham, aspects of which were included in God's later covenant with the nation of Israel. In the covenant God promised Abraham that if he obeyed, God would: give him numerous descendants (vv. 5–7); give his descendants the land of Canaan (v. 8); and bless all nations through him (as per the following subsection). In conjunction with this, God would be Abraham's and his descendants' God (v. 7).

. . . and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham

Gen 12:3 [GOD, TO ABRAHAM:] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*. ESV

Abraham believed God, and God credited this to him as righteousness

Gen 15:5b–6 [GOD, TO ABRAHAM:] "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." *Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." [6]And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.* ESV

God confirmed the covenant and promises with Abraham's descendants

Ps 105:8–11 *He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, [9]the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, [10]which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, [11]saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance."* ESV

b) God's Making of Israel as His People

God made the nation of Israel . . .

Isa 43:1 Now, this is what *the* LORD says, *the one who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel*: "Don't be afraid, for I will protect you. I call you by name, you are mine. NET

. . . The people of Israel were Abraham's descendants

Isa 41:8 [GOD:] But *you, Israel my servant, you are the people that I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham*, my friend. GNT

The people of Israel were Abraham's descendants through Isaac, his second son, and then Jacob, Isaac's second son. Israel gets its name from Jacob who was renamed "Israel". (As such, Israel is also sometimes referred to as "Jacob".) Making the nation of Israel from Abraham's descendants was a key part of God's fulfillment of his covenant promise to Abraham that he would give him countless descendants.

God redeemed the Israelites out of Egypt to take them as his own

2Sam 7:23–24 [DAVID, TO GOD:] And *who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people*, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before *your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt*, a nation and its gods? [24]*And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever.* And you, O LORD, became their God. ESV

By redeeming the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt, God in a sense bought them as his own, making them his people.

God chose Israel out of all the nations to be his holy people

Deut 7:6 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] For *you are a people holy to the* LORD *your God. The* LORD *your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.* ESV

Note: Foreigners were accepted into Israel and able to worship God

Num 15:14–15 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] From now on *if foreigners who live among you want to make offerings by fire so the smell will be pleasing to the* LORD*, they must offer them the same way you do.* [15]*The law is the same for you and for foreigners, and it will be from now on; you and the foreigners are alike before the* LORD. NCV™

In making Israel his own people or nation, God did not exclude other people from living among them and worshiping him.

c) God's Covenant with Israel and the Law

See also:

- *I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role*, p. 146

God made a covenant with Israel, based on his law . . .

Ex 34:27–28 *The* LORD *said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."* [28]So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water. He wrote on the tablets *the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.* NET

. . . If the Israelites obeyed God, then they would be his people and he would be their God

Jer 11:4b [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Obey me and carry out the terms of the agreement exactly as I commanded you. If you do, you will be my people and I will be your God.* NET

If Israel kept the covenant by obeying God's commands, then under the covenant they would be God's people and he would be their God.

The core of the law: The Ten Commandments

Ex 20:1–11 Then God spoke all these words: [2]"I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [3]*"You shall have no other gods besides me.* [4]*"You shall not make for yourselves an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or on earth below, or in the water under the earth.* [5]*You shall not bow down to them in worship or serve them*; because I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the iniquity of the parents, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, [6]but showing gracious love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments. [7]*"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God*, because the LORD will not leave the one who misuses his name unpunished. [8]*"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.* [9]*Six days you shall labor and do all your work,* [10]*but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. And you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male or female servants, nor your livestock, nor the alien who is within your gates.* [11]For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ISV

Ex 20:12–17 *"Honor your father and your mother, that* you may live a long time in the land the LORD your God is giving to you. [13]*"You shall not murder.* [14]*"You shall not commit adultery.* [15]*"You shall not steal.* [16]*"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.* [17]*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor."* NET

> The Ten Commandments form the fundamentals of the law that God gave through Moses (sometimes referred to as the Mosaic Law). The first four commandments (vv. 1–11) concern one's relationship with God. The remaining six (above) concern one's relationships with other people.

By obeying all the law, the Israelites would have righteousness and life

Deut 6:25 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *It will be righteousness for us, if we're careful to obey all the law* before the LORD our God, as he commanded. ISV

Lev 18:5 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] So *you must keep my statutes and my regulations; anyone who does so will live by keeping them*. I am the LORD. NET

By obeying, the Israelites would have life and prosperity in the promised land

Deut 5:33 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Walk just as he has commanded you so that you may live, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land you are going to possess.* NET

If they broke the covenant, there would be dreadful consequences – culminating in exile from the land

Lev 26:25, 32–33 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *I will bring war on you to punish you for breaking our covenant, and if you gather in your cities for safety, I will send incurable diseases among you, and you will be forced to surrender to your enemies. … [32]I will destroy your land so completely that the enemies who occupy it will be shocked at the destruction.* [33]*I will bring war on you and scatter you in foreign lands. Your land will be deserted, and your cities left in ruins.* GNT

d) The Ark of the Covenant and God's Presence

The construction of the ark of the covenant

Ex 37:1, 6–7 *Bezalel* [a skilled craftsman] *made the ark of acacia wood; its length was three feet nine inches, its width two feet three inches, and its height two feet three inches. … [6]He made an atonement lid of pure gold; its length was three feet nine inches, and its width was two feet three inches.* [7]*He made two cherubim of gold; he made*

them of hammered metal on the two ends of the atonement lid, … NET

The ark was made in accordance with the instructions God had given to Moses (cf. Ex 25:10–20). Note that cherubim (v. 7) are understood to be one of the highest orders of angels.

The ark contained the stone tablets of the covenant

Ex 40:20 *He* [Moses] *took the testimony and put it in the ark, attached the poles to the ark, and then put the atonement lid on the ark.* NET

The "testimony" refers to the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them, which were essentially the terms of the covenant. As such the stone tablets bore "testimony" to God's covenant with Israel.

The ark signified God's presence amongst the people, where God would meet with Moses

Ex 25:22 [God, to Moses:] *I will meet with you there, and from above the atonement lid, from between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will command you for the Israelites.* NET

The ark brought great power and dreadful effects

Josh 4:6–7 [Joshua, to the Israelites:] The stones will be a reminder to you. When your children ask someday, 'Why are these stones important to you?' [7]tell them how *the water of the Jordan stopped flowing before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the water of the Jordan stopped flowing.* These stones will be a lasting memorial for the Israelites. NET

1Sam 5:11 So they [the people of the Philistine city of Ekron] assembled all the leaders of the Philistines and said, *"Get the ark of the God of Israel out of here! Let it go back to its own place so that it won't kill us and our people!" The terror of death was throughout the entire city; God was attacking them very severely there.* NET

The Philistines had captured the ark and suffered severely as a result.

The ark was kept in the Most Holy Place, shielded by a curtain . . .

Ex 26:31–34 [God, to Moses:] *You are to make a special curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine twisted linen; it is to be made with cherubim*, the work of an artistic designer. [32]You are to hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold, set in four silver bases. [33]*You are to hang this curtain under the clasps and bring the ark of the testimony in there behind the curtain. The curtain will make a division for you between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.* [34]You are to put the atonement lid on *the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place*. NET

The Most Holy Place was the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and later the temple.

. . . Access into the Most Holy Place was greatly restricted

Heb 9:6–8 When everything in the Tent was made ready in this way, the priests went into the first room every day to worship. [7]But *only the high priest could go into the second room, and he did that only once a year*. He could never enter the inner room without taking blood with him, which he offered to God for himself and for sins the people did without knowing they did them. [8]The Holy Spirit uses this to show that *the way into the Most Holy Place was not open while the system of the old Holy Tent was still being used*. NCV™

Note that the mention of "the system of the old Holy Tent" (v. 8) refers to the covenant that God made with Israel, of which a marked feature was the tent (or tabernacle) structure and its special configuration.

Containing the ark, the tabernacle and later the temple signified God's presence

Ex 25:8–9 [God, to Moses:] *Let them make for me a sanctuary, so that I may live among them.* [9]According to all that I am showing you – the pattern of *the tabernacle* and the pattern of all its furnishings – you must make it exactly so. NET

1Ki 8:6, 10–13 *The priests brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its assigned place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, in the most holy place*, under the wings of the cherubs. … [10]Once the priests left the holy place, *a cloud filled the*

LORD's temple. [11]*The priests could not carry out their duties because of the cloud; the LORD's glory filled his temple.* [12]*Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he lives in thick darkness.* [13]*O LORD, truly I have built a lofty temple for you, a place where you can live permanently."* NET

Note that the term "thick darkness" (v. 12) refers to the dark cloud of God's presence (vv. 10–11).

e) God's Faithfulness to His Covenant with Israel

The following subsections show that God was faithful to his covenant with Israel, keeping the promises he made with it.

God faithfully led Israel through the desert and provided for them

Neh 9:19–21 [LEVITES, TO GOD:] *Due to your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. The pillar of cloud did not stop guiding them in the path by day, nor did the pillar of fire stop illuminating for them by night the path on which they should travel.* [20]*You imparted your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths; you provided water for their thirst.* [21]*For forty years you sustained them. Even in the desert they never lacked anything. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.* NET

God promised that none of Israel's enemies would withstand it – which he fulfilled

Deut 11:25 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Nobody will be able to resist you; the LORD your God will spread the fear and terror of you over the whole land on which you walk, just as he promised you.* NET

Josh 21:44 *The LORD made them secure, in fulfillment of all he had solemnly promised their ancestors. None of their enemies could resist them.* NET

Conquering its inhabitants, God gave the promised land of Canaan to Israel – as an inheritance

Ps 78:55a *He forced nations out of their way and gave them the land of the nations as their inheritance.* GW

Josh 21:43 *So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had solemnly promised to their ancestors, and they conquered it and lived in it.* NET

God duly cared for Israel in the promised land

2Chr 32:22 *The LORD delivered Hezekiah and the residents of Jerusalem from the power of King Sennacherib of Assyria and from all the other nations. He made them secure on every side.* NET

So, God was faithful to his covenants and promises with Abraham and Israel

Ps 105:8–11, 42 *He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,* [9]*the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,* [10]*which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,* [11]*saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." …* [42]*For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant.* ESV

Josh 21:45 *Not one of the LORD's faithful promises to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; every one was realized.* NET

f) God's Dealings and Covenant with David

David was chosen and anointed by God, as ruler over Israel

1Ki 8:16b [GOD:] *I've chosen David to rule my people Israel.* GW

2Sam 23:1 This was David's last composition: *The oracle of David, son of Jesse, an oracle by the valiant one who was exalted— anointed by the God of Jacob,* the contented psalm writer of Israel. ISV

David reigned over Israel, as a powerful and righteous king – undergirded by God

2Sam 5:10, 12 *David became a great and strong ruler, because the LORD All-Powerful was on his side. ... [12]David knew that the LORD had made him king of Israel and that he had made him a powerful ruler for the good of his people.* CEV

2Sam 8:15 *David was king over all Israel, and he did what was fair and right for all his people.* NCV™

God's covenant with David, promising that David's royal dynasty would last forever

2Sam 7:11b–16 [THE PROPHET NATHAN, TO DAVID:] *The LORD declares to you that he himself will build a dynastic house for you. [12]When the time comes for you to die, I* [God] *will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. [13]He will build a house for my name, and I will make his dynasty permanent. [14]I will become his father and he will become my son.* When he sins, I will correct him with the rod of men and with wounds inflicted by human beings. [15]*But my loyal love will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. [16]Your house and your kingdom will stand before me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent.* NET

> In vv. 11b, 16 "house" refers to a royal dynasty that God would build for David, in response to his desire to build a "house" (v. 13) or temple for God. The "descendant" spoken of in vv. 12–15 initially refers to David's son Solomon, but is generally understood to ultimately speak of the Messiah. As such this covenant provided the people of Israel with the hope of a permanently secure kingdom (cf. vv. 10–11a) under a godly and powerful king.

Note: God chose Jerusalem, David's city, as his dwelling place

Ps 132:13–14 *Certainly the LORD has chosen Zion* [Jerusalem]; *he decided to make it his home. [14]He said, "This will be my resting place forever; I will live here, for I have chosen it.* NET

> God chose the city of Jerusalem, from which David ruled, to be the place which signified his presence among his people – as consummately indicated by the building of God's temple there. As such it was the center of worship of God. Note that "Zion" was originally the name of one of the hills on which Jerusalem was built, but came to be used to signify all of Jerusalem.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 9

The Problem of Sin

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I. General

Knowing what sin is and what its consequences are is vital to understanding God's relationship with humankind and to appreciating the need for Jesus Christ's mission. It also helps us not to sin by: clarifying what sin is (which this chapter does in general terms); and providing great motivation to avoid sin.

a) What Sin Is

Sin is breaking God's law

1Jn 3:4 *Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law.* GNT

Neh 9:29 [Levites, to God:] And you warned them in order *to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules,* which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. ESV

Even unintentionally breaking God's law is sin

Lev 4:27 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *If any person in the community sins by accident and does something which the Lord has commanded must not be done, he is guilty.* NCV™

Doing evil is sin

Ps 51:4 [David, to God:] Against you – you above all – *I have sinned; I have done what is evil* in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me. NET

All wrongdoing is sin

1Jn 5:17a *Doing wrong is always sin …* NCV™

Not doing what we should do is sin

James 4:17 So *whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.* NET

b) Sin Is against God

The fact that sin is against God is also reflected by the previous section, where sin is defined as breaking God's law.

Sin is action against God

Lev 26:40 [God, speaking of his wayward people:] But if they confess *their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me,* and also in walking contrary to me, … ESV

Neh 1:6b–7 [Nehemiah, to God:] *I am confessing the sins of the Israelites that we have committed against you* – both I myself and my family have sinned. [7]*We have behaved corruptly against you, not obeying the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments that you commanded your servant Moses.* NET

Even acting wrongfully against other people is sinning against God

2Sam 12:10, 13a [God, to David:] So now the sword will never depart from your house. For *you have despised me by taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own!' …* [13]*Then David exclaimed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord!"* NET

Sin is rebellion against God

Ps 5:10b [David, to God:] Drive them out of your presence because of *their many sins* and *their rebellion against you.* GNT

David correlates "their many sins" with "their rebellion against you".

For sin involves: turning away from God and his commands; . . .

Isa 59:12b–13a [Isaiah, speaking on behalf of his people:] *Our sins testify against us.* Our rebellious acts are with us. We know our wrongdoings. [13]*We have rebelled and denied the Lord. We have turned away from our God.* GW

Dan 9:4–5 [Daniel:] O Lord, great and awesome God who is faithful to his covenant with those who love him and keep his commandments, [5]*we have sinned!* We have done what is wrong and wicked; we have rebelled *by turning away from your commandments and standards.* NET

. . . and going our own way

Isa 53:6 We have all strayed like sheep. *Each one of us has turned to go his own way*, and the LORD has laid *all our sins* on him. GW

Sin is hated by God

Isa 61:8a For *I, the LORD, love justice and hate robbery and sin.* NET

Zec 8:17 *Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another. Do not favor a false oath – these are all things that I hate,' says the LORD.* NET

God can be grieved by sin

Ps 78:40 [A PSALMIST, SPEAKING OF ISRAEL'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD:] *How they rebelled against him in the desert, grieving him in the wilderness!* ISV

c) Sin Is Universal

All people have sinned

1Ki 8:46a [SOLOMON, TO GOD:] When your people sin against you—and *there is no one who does not sin …* GNT

Rom 3:23 *All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.* CEV

The expression "fallen short of God's glory" most likely means that all have failed to measure up to a standard compatible with God's glory.

No one is righteous before God

Ps 143:2 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for *no living person is righteous in your sight.* ISV

People have a sinful nature . . .

Gal 5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death *their human nature with all its passions and desires*. GNT

Ps 51:5 [DAVID:] Look, *I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me*. NET

. . . People have minds inclined towards evil

Gen 8:21a And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma [from Noah's offerings] and said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of *humankind*, even though *the inclination of their minds is evil from childhood on*. NET

People are led into sin by their sinful nature . . .

Rom 7:18–19 [PAUL:] *I know that nothing good lives in me; that is, nothing good lives in my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don't do it.* [19]I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, *I do the evil that I don't want to do.* GW

. . . People are led into sin by their corrupt hearts and minds

Mark 7:21–22 For *from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder,* [22]*adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly*. NET

Rom 8:7 For *the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot*. ESV

The term "the flesh" refers to people's sinful nature.

Note: God is aware of all sins . . .

Jer 16:17 [GOD, SPEAKING OF THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] For *I see everything they do. Their wicked ways are not hidden from me. Their sin is not hidden away where I cannot see it.* NET

. . . and God remembers sin

Hos 7:2 [GOD, SPEAKING OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] *They do not realize that I remember all of their wicked deeds. Their evil deeds have now surrounded them; their sinful deeds are always before me.* NET

d) Sin's Intrinsic Ill Effects

Shame

Ezra 9:6 [EZRA:] I prayed, "*My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are so many.* They are higher than our heads. Our guilt even reaches up to the sky. NCV™

Spiritual defilement . . .

Ezek 14:11a [GOD:] I will do this to keep the Israelites from deserting me and *defiling themselves by their sins*. GNT

. . . Spiritual uncleanness

Ps 106:39 Thus *they* [sinful Israelites] *became unclean by their acts*, and played the whore in their deeds. ESV

Separation from God . . .

Isa 59:2 [ISAIAH, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] But *your sinful acts have alienated you from your God; your sins have caused him to reject you and not listen to your prayers*. NET

> Because sin defiles us and makes us spiritually "unclean", it necessarily separates us from God. For God is holy – set apart from sin and consequent spiritual "uncleanness".

. . . and spiritual death

Col 2:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] When *you were spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were not free from the power of your sinful self*, God made you alive with Christ, and he forgave all our sins. NCV™

> This verse refers to what is known as spiritual death. Spiritual death involves being cut off from God – "dead to God" – without his Holy Spirit, who brings spiritual life.

Enslavement to sin

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, *everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin*. NET

Rom 7:14–15 [PAUL:] For we know that the law is spiritual – but *I am unspiritual, sold into slavery to sin.* [15]For I don't understand what I am doing. *For I do not do what I want – instead, I do what I hate.* NET

Foolishness and spiritual darkness

Rom 1:18, 21–22 God's anger is revealed from heaven against all *the sin and evil of the people whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known*. … [21]They know God, but *they do not give him the honor that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness.* [22]*They say they are wise, but they are fools*; … GNT

> The "truth" (v. 18) is the truth about God revealed to all through the testimony of creation (cf. vv. 19–21a). By sin and evil, such people suppress the truth – from themselves as well as others. Verses 21–22 further demonstrate that ungodliness, with its disregard of God, leads to spiritual darkness and foolishness.

e) Sin Brings God's Judgment – Ultimately Death

When one sins, one becomes guilty

Lev 6:3–4a If you find something that someone lost and lie about it under oath, or *commit any other sin like this,* [4]*you are sinning and will be guilty*. GW

Sin makes one subject to God's anger

Eph 2:3 Actually *all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds*. In our natural condition *we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.* GNT

> Here Paul refers to how all people have lived sinful lives, making them subject to God's anger.

God's anger against sinners is manifested in judgment

Isa 13:9, 11 *Look, the LORD's day of judgment is coming; it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging*

anger, destroying the earth and annihilating its sinners. ...[GOD:] [11]*I will punish the world for its evil, and wicked people for their sin.* I will put an end to the pride of the insolent, I will bring down the arrogance of tyrants. NET

Sin results in physical death

Rom 5:12 Therefore, just as *sin entered the world through one man* [Adam], *and death through sin, so death spread to everyone, because all have sinned*. ISV

People may experience God's wrath and judgment for sin in various forms during their lifetime, but common to all is the judgment of physical death. Note the reference to death initially coming as a consequence of Adam's original sin.

Sin brings the prospect of eternal "death"

Rom 6:21, 23 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So what benefit did you then reap from those things that you are now ashamed of? For *the end of those things is death. ...* [23]*For the payoff of sin is death,* but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. NET

Particularly in view of the contrast with "eternal life" (v. 23), "death" (vv. 21, 23) appears to primarily refer to or at least encompass what is sometimes referred to as eternal "death". Because of his justice God demands that unforgiven sin be punished with eternal "death" or destruction, involving eternal separation from God in hell. A complementary reason for this "death" is that sin makes separation from God necessary, because of his holiness.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

See also:

- *I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role*, p. 146

In the law on which his covenant with Israel was based, God made provision for atonement to be made for anyone who sinned, and so for the sinner to be forgiven. This allowed the Israelites to remain in their covenant relationship with him, providing that they did not actually give up following God and his laws, as per the terms of the covenant. Sadly Israel would fail to hold to the covenant, willfully forsaking God's laws and persisting in sin.

The NT contains numerous references to the Mosaic Law's provision for Israel's sin. An understanding of what this provision involved enables us to more fully comprehend why Jesus Christ came and the significance of his work. For many of the concepts involved in Jesus Christ's work have their origin in the law's stipulations for making offerings for atonement for sin. These aspects of the law actually foreshadowed – and would be superseded by – what Jesus Christ would do and implement.

Note that most of the following passages involve instructions given by God to Moses for the Israelites, with either God or Moses speaking.

a) Offerings for Atonement for Sinners

See also:

- *b) Jesus Christ's Death and Atonement for Sin*, p. 136

The law made provision for the offering of a life of an animal, to make atonement for one who had sinned

Num 15:27–28 *If any person sins unintentionally, then he must bring a yearling female goat for a purification offering.* [28]*And the priest must make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally — when he sins unintentionally before the* LORD *— to make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.* NET

Under the Mosaic Law, when a person sinned the person had to bring an animal for a priest to sacrifice as an offering of a life to make atonement for the person. Biblical atonement is where God accepts such an offering or sacrifice of a living being as a substitute for the life of a person who has sinned – the person's life otherwise being required as punishment for their sin. As such, God accepts the sacrifice as payment for the person's sin. The result is that sin is taken away – and so the sinner is forgiven, pronounced righteous and reconciled to God.

The major offerings for making atonement: The burnt offering; . . .

Lev 1:4, 9b *He* [a person who had sinned] *shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. …* [9]*… And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering,* a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ESV

One of the main uses of a burnt offering was for making atonement for sinners, where it appears to have been used for one's sin in general. Other kinds of uses were: as an expression of devotion to God; as an expression of thanksgiving to God; and to accompany/supplement an appeal to God. It was the only offering where the whole of the animal was burnt up on the altar; as such it expressed one's complete devotion to God.

. . . the sin offering; . . .

Lev 5:5–6 … when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, [6]*he shall bring to the* LORD *as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.* ESV

. . . and the guilt offering

Lev 5:17–19 "If a person sins and violates any of the Lord's commandments which must not be violated (although he did not know it at the time, but later realizes he is guilty), then he will bear his punishment for iniquity [18]and must *bring a flawless ram from the flock, convertible into silver shekels, for a guilt offering to the priest. So the priest will make atonement on his behalf for his error which he committed* (although he himself had not known it) *and he will be forgiven.* [19]*It is a guilt offering; he was surely guilty before the* LORD*."* NET

The guilt offering was quite similar to the sin offering, in both the process and purpose. The main difference appears to be that it was required in matters where restitution was quantifiable and so could be made for the wrongdoing. The guilt offering was made along with the restitution and a twenty percent surcharge.

Atonement was also made annually for all of the people

Lev 16:17, 24 Nobody is to be in the Meeting Tent when he [Aaron, the high priest] *enters to make atonement in the holy place* until he goes out, and *he has made atonement on his behalf, on behalf of his household, and on behalf of the whole assembly of Israel.* ... [24]Then he must bathe his body in water in a holy place, put on his clothes, and *go out and make his burnt offering and the people's burnt offering. So he is to make atonement on behalf of himself and the people.* NET

Lev 16:29–30 This is to be a perpetual statute for you [the Israelites]. *In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month,* you must humble yourselves and do no work of any kind, both the native citizen and the foreigner who resides in your midst, [30]*for on this day atonement is to be made for you to cleanse you from all your sins;* you must be clean before the LORD. NET

The Day of Atonement was to be observed once each year, for the high priest to cleanse the Israelite nation as a whole of all sin. It was the most important observance of the OT rituals, the only time the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place.

b) Aspects of Making Offerings for Sin

All offerings were only to be made at the place God chose for his presence amongst his people

Deut 12:13–14 *Make sure you do not offer burnt offerings in any place you wish,* [14]*for you may do so only in the place the LORD chooses in one of your tribal areas – there you may do everything I am commanding you.* NET

Ex 29:11 [GOD:] *Kill the bull there in my holy presence at the entrance of the Tent.* GNT

The various kinds of offerings were only to be made on the altar at the place of God's presence amongst the people that was signified by the ark of the covenant. Initially this was at the Tent of Meeting (the tabernacle) and later at the temple. This was partly to ensure that the offerings were offered by the priests, God's chosen mediators between the people and himself. Additionally, it safeguarded against inappropriate offerings and procedures – and against worship of other gods.

Animals brought as offerings were to be without any blemish

Lev 4:32 *If this person* [who had sinned] *brings a lamb as his offering for sin, he must bring a female that has nothing wrong with it.* NCV™

The sinner laid hands on the offering, identifying the animal with themself

Lev 1:4 *He must lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.* NET

This practice appears to have signified that the animal was a substitute for the sinner. Moreover, it may also have signified the transfer of the person's sins to the animal (cf. Lev 16:21–22).

The blood of the offerings for sin featured in making atonement . . .

Lev 4:16–20 Then *the high priest must bring some of the blood of the bull to the Meeting Tent,* [17]*and that priest must dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD toward the front of the veil–canopy.* [18]*He must put some of the blood on the horns of the altar which is before the LORD in the Meeting Tent, and all the rest of the blood he must pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the Meeting Tent.* [19]"'Then the priest must take all its fat and offer the fat up in smoke on the altar. [20]He must do with the rest of the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; this is what he must do with it. *So the priest will make atonement on their behalf and they will be forgiven.* NET

As this passage illustrates, the blood of animals sacrificed as offerings to make atonement for sinners featured prominently in the instructions given for presenting the offerings. The reason was the correlation of blood with life (as discussed in the following subsection). The blood signified the life of the animal, given as a substitute for the life of the sinner (as reflected in the previous subsection).

. . . for the life of a creature is in its blood – and as such blood is not to be eaten

Lev 17:11–12 [God:] ... for *the life of every living thing is in the blood. So I myself have assigned it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives, for the blood makes atonement by means of the life.* [12]*Therefore, I have said to the Israelites: No person among you is to eat blood, and no resident foreigner who lives among you is to eat blood.* NET

> Blood sustains life and as such is to a large degree correlated with life. Because of this correlation the Israelites were not to eat blood – a command that NT believers continued to uphold (cf. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). This command was particularly pertinent in the context of making offerings. For in some kinds of animal offerings the meat was to be eaten, and so the people were required to first drain the blood from it.

c) The Role of the Priests

God designated Aaron and his descendants as priests

Ex 28:1 [God, to Moses:] And you, *bring near to you your brother Aaron and his sons with him from among the Israelites, so that they may minister as my priests – Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.* NET

Ex 29:8–9 [God, to Moses:] Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, [9]and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. *And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever.* Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. ESV

> When God made his covenant with Israel, he instituted the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood as an integral aspect of the covenant law, in particular in regard to the regulations concerning the people's relationship with himself.

The priests were responsible for God's sanctuary, the offerings and teaching the people

Num 18:7a But *you* [Aaron] *and your sons with you are responsible for your priestly duties, for everything at the altar and within the curtain.* NET

Lev 21:6 They [the priests] must be holy to their God and show respect for God's name, because *they present the offerings made by fire to the Lord,* which is the food of their God. So they must be holy. NCV™

Lev 10:11 *You* [the priests] *must teach the people all the laws that the Lord gave to them through Moses.* NCV™

The offering of incense by the priests

Ex 30:7–8 *Aaron must burn sweet-smelling incense on the altar every morning when he comes to take care of the oil lamps.* [8]*He must burn incense again in the evening when he lights the lamps, so incense will burn before the Lord every day from now on.* NCV™

> Sweet smelling incense was regularly offered by priests to God, primarily in being burned before him, but also in being added to some other offerings. This was to honor God with such a beautiful and pleasing aroma. The fact that the incense was costly was also honoring to God, in it being offered up to him.

The priests made offerings for people when they sinned, to make atonement for them

Lev 19:22 And *the priest shall make atonement for him* [a person who had sinned] *with the ram of the guilt offering before the Lord for his sin that he has committed,* and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed. ESV

The high priest made atonement for Israel as a whole

Lev 16:32–34a *"The priest who is anointed and ordained to act as high priest in place of his father is to make atonement. He is to put on the linen garments, the holy garments,* [33]*and he is to purify the Most Holy Place, he is to purify the Meeting Tent and the altar, and he is to make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.* [34]This is to be a perpetual statute for you *to make atonement for the Israelites for all their sins once a year."* NET

d) Ceremonial Cleanness

Alongside the regulations governing atonement for sin, the law had regulations for ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness – of which the latter, at least at times, like sin required atonement. These regulations regarding cleanness were based on the need for God's people to be holy as he is holy. Holiness is essential if God's people are to exist with him, for he does not abide with nor tolerate that which is not holy.

The stipulations as to what denoted ceremonial uncleanness were – largely at least – based on what was physically dirty or unhealthy. In contrast to such things God's own holiness involves absolute purity and perfection – morally and otherwise. Maintaining ceremonial cleanness in God's presence – particularly in deliberately approaching him, such as in worship – was in accordance with and an acknowledgement of God's holiness. As such the law demanded the Israelites be ceremonially clean.

Uncleanness also makes an apt parallel to and is correlated with that which is morally unholy. As such, maintaining ceremonial cleanness reinforced the need to maintain spiritual or moral cleanness – discerning and avoiding both sin and sources of it.

Because God is holy, his people must be holy – which included avoiding uncleanness

Lev 11:44–45 I am the LORD your God. *Keep yourselves holy for me because I am holy. Don't make yourselves unclean* with any of these crawling animals. [45]I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt to be your God; *you must be holy because I am holy.* NCV™

Uncleanness largely came through contact with things that were unclean

Lev 5:2 *If someone unintentionally touches anything ritually unclean, such as a dead animal, he is unclean* and guilty as soon as he realizes what he has done. GNT

Creatures were designated as either clean or unclean for eating

Lev 11:46–47 *"These are the instructions about animals, birds, and every living creature that swims in the water and every creature that swarms on the ground. [47]These instructions help you distinguish between clean and unclean, the animals you may eat and those you may not eat."* GW

Uncleanness would defile God's dwelling place amidst his people – and so required isolation

Lev 15:31 *The LORD told Moses to warn the people of Israel about their uncleanness, so that they would not defile the Tent of his presence, which was in the middle of the camp.* If they did, they would be killed. GNT

Deut 23:10–11 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If someone among you becomes unclean* due to nocturnal emissions, *he must leave the camp and stay outside.* [11]As evening approaches he must wash himself with water. Then at sunset, he may return to the camp. ISV

While a person was unclean they could not participate in worship practices

Num 9:6a But *some of the people could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were unclean from touching a dead body.* NCV™

2Chr 23:19 *He* [Jehoiada the priest] *posted guards at the gates of the LORD's temple, so no one who was ceremonially unclean in any way could enter.* NET

Cleansing typically involved washing and a purification period

Lev 17:15 If a person, either a citizen or a foreigner, eats an animal that died by itself or was killed by another animal, *he must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will be unclean until evening; then he will be clean.* NCV™

Uncleanness often required offerings for atonement

Lev 14:19–20 *The priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness.* And afterward he

shall kill the burnt offering. [20]And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. *Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.* ESV

Uncleanness was contrary to God's holiness and, in accordance, also his law. As such atonement for uncleanness was required.

Note: Spiritual purity is paralleled with cleanness, and sin with uncleanness

Prov 20:9 Who can say, *"I have kept my heart clean; I am pure from my sin"?* NET

Lam 1:8a *Jerusalem has sinned greatly, therefore she has become unclean.* ISV

e) Epilogue: Israel's Persistence in Sin

Despite the Mosaic Law's provision for Israel's sin, the Israelites as a whole persisted in sin – rebelling against God and breaking his covenant with them. This showed that ultimately the law was not sufficient to deal with sin.

Israel's sin and rebellion in the desert

Ps 78:17, 40–41 *They continued to sin against him, to rebel in the desert against the Most High. ...* [40]*How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness! How often they caused him grief in the desert!* [41]*Again and again they tested God, and they pushed the Holy One of Israel to the limit.* GW

God gave Israel his law early on in its journey from Egypt to the promised land. Despite this, Israel regularly sinned and rebelled against God throughout its desert journey.

Israel's sin and unfaithfulness during the time of the judges

Judg 2:18–19 When enemies made life miserable for the Israelites, the LORD would feel sorry for them. He would choose a judge and help that judge rescue Israel from its enemies. The LORD would be kind to Israel as long as that judge lived. [19]*But afterwards, the Israelites would become even more sinful than their ancestors had been. The Israelites were stubborn—they simply would not stop worshiping other gods or following the teachings of other religions.* CEV

Note that the "judges" – from which the book of Judges takes its name – were the occasional leaders of Israel during the time following Joshua (and the settling of the promised land) until the death of Samuel, Israel's last judge.

Solomon's unfaithfulness and the consequent division of the kingdom . . .

1Ki 11:9–13 *The LORD was angry with Solomon because he had shifted his allegiance away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him on two occasions* [10]*and had warned him about this very thing, so that he would not follow other gods. But he did not obey the LORD's command.* [11]*So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you insist on doing these things and have not kept the covenantal rules I gave you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.* [12]*However, for your father David's sake I will not do this while you are alive. I will tear it away from your son's hand instead.* [13]*But I will not tear away the entire kingdom; I will leave your son one tribe for my servant David's sake and for the sake of my chosen city Jerusalem."* NET

Solomon followed his father David as king, David having followed Saul, Israel's first king. Solomon's son was Rehoboam. During Rehoboam's reign the kingdom was divided.

. . . Jeroboam's subsequent archetypical apostasy in the northern kingdom

2Ki 17:21–22 When he [God] tore Israel away from the family of David, the people of Israel made Jeroboam (Nebat's son) king. *Jeroboam forced Israel away from the LORD and led them to commit a serious sin.* [22]*The Israelites followed all the sins Jeroboam committed and never turned away from them.* GW

Following the division of Israel, Jeroboam was the first king of the breakaway northern kingdom, which was simply called "Israel". Jeroboam was concerned that if his people went to worship at the temple in Jerusalem – in the southern kingdom of Judah – he would risk losing his kingdom. He thus decided to institute false gods and an alternative system of worship. The false worship that Jeroboam instituted persisted throughout the existence of the northern kingdom of Israel, until the kingdom's demise.

Some kings in Judah did lead the people in godly ways . . .

2Chr 14:2–4 *Asa did what the* LORD *his God desired and approved.* [3]*He removed the pagan altars and the high places, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles.* [4]*He ordered Judah to seek the* LORD *God of their ancestors and to observe his law and commands.* NET

2Chr 19:4 *Jehoshaphat* lived in Jerusalem. *He went out among the people from Beer Sheba to the hill country of Ephraim and encouraged them to follow the* LORD *God of their ancestors.* NET

. . . but ultimately both kingdoms of Israel failed to keep God's laws and broke his covenant

Jer 11:10 [GOD:] *They have gone back to the evil ways of their ancestors of old who refused to obey what I told them. They, too, have paid allegiance to other gods and worshiped them. Both the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah have violated the covenant I made with their ancestors.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 10

God’s Judgment

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I. Basics

The fact that God does and will judge us is one of the Bible's key teachings, without which the significance of other key Bible teachings is lost – notably that of salvation. An understanding of it is also vital to understanding God himself. Additionally, bear in mind that God's judgment – being just and righteous – actually gives his people much reason to be encouraged.

a) God Is the Judge of the World

God is judge . . .

Ps 50:6 The heavens declare his fairness, for *God is judge*. (Selah) NET

. . . God is the judge of the whole earth

Gen 18:25b [ABRAHAM, TO GOD:] *You are the judge of all the earth*, and you do what is right. CEV

God makes judgments in the world

1Chr 16:14 He is the LORD our God; *he carries out judgment throughout the earth*. NET

God judges nations

Joel 3:12 [GOD:] Let the nations be roused and let them go up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for *there I will sit in judgment on all the surrounding nations*. NET

God judges individuals

Ezek 33:20b [GOD:] *I will judge each of you according to his behavior*. NET

God judges his own people

Heb 10:30b *"The Lord will judge his people."* NET

God judges evil spiritual powers

1Tim 3:6 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY:] But an elder must not be a new believer, or he might be too proud of himself and be *judged guilty just as the devil was*. NCV™

2Pet 2:4 *God didn't spare angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, where he has secured them with chains of darkness and is holding them for judgment.* GW

b) Reasons for God's Judgment

To punish sin and unfaithfulness

Dan 9:11 [DANIEL, TO GOD:] *All Israel has broken your law and turned away by not obeying you. Therefore you have poured out on us the judgment solemnly threatened in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against you.* NET

Ezek 17:20 [GOD, PRONOUNCING JUDGMENT ON KING ZEDEKIAH:] I will throw my net over him and he will be caught in my snare; *I will bring him to Babylon and judge him there because of the unfaithfulness he committed against me*. NET

To discipline and cleanse God's people

1Cor 11:32 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But *when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined* so that we may not be condemned with the world. NET

Isa 4:4 [ISAIAH, SPEAKING OF GOD:] At that time *the sovereign master will wash the excrement from Zion's women, he will rinse the bloodstains from Jerusalem's midst, as he comes to judge and to bring devastation*. NET

To punish the ungodly . . .

2Pet 3:7 But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for *the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly*. NET

. . . and to exact just vengeance

Rev 19:2b For *he has judged the great prostitute* ["Babylon"] *who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality, and has avenged the blood of his servants poured out by her own hands!* NET

The reference is to the symbolic Babylon, representative of a world power/s opposed to God and his people.

To save God's people

Ex 6:6 [God, to Moses:] Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and *I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment*. ESV

To vindicate God's people

Jer 51:9b–10 *God has punished Babylonia with all his might and has destroyed it completely.'"* [10]*The Lord says, "My people shout, 'The Lord has shown that we are in the right.* Let's go and tell the people in Jerusalem what the Lord our God has done.'" GNT

To reward God's people

Rev 11:18 [Elders in heaven, to God:] The nations were enraged, but your wrath has come, and *the time has come for the dead to be judged, and the time has come to give to your servants, the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints and to those who revere your name, both small and great*, and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth. NET

> As well as punishment for wrongdoing, God's judgment includes reward for godliness.

Note: God's judgments serve as examples and warnings to others

1Cor 10:11a [Paul, speaking of judgments on Israel:] *All these things happened to them as examples for others, and they were written down as a warning for us.* GNT

c) God's Judgment Is Just

God judges with justice

Rev 16:5, 7 And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "*Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. ...* [7]And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and *just are your judgments!*" ESV

God judges righteously

Ps 9:4 [David, to God:] For you have brought about justice for me and my cause; *you sit on the throne judging righteously*. ISV

2Thes 1:5 [Paul, to believers:] All of this shows that *God judges fairly* and that he is making you fit to share in his kingdom for which you are suffering. CEV

God does not show favoritism in his judgment

1Pet 1:17 [Peter, to believers:] And if you address as Father *the one who impartially judges* according to each one's work, live out the time of your temporary residence here in reverence. NET

God judges people with knowledge of all their deeds

Jer 32:19b [Jeremiah, to God:] *You see everything people do. You reward each of them for the way they live and for the things they do.* NET

> A key factor as to why God's judgment is just is that he judges and rewards people with knowledge of all their deeds – as well as of all their thoughts and motives (as per the following subsection). As such he can make judgments with knowledge of all the relevant information.

God takes into account thoughts and motives

Jer 11:20a [Jeremiah:] So I said to the Lord, "O Lord who rules over all, *you are a just judge! You examine people's hearts and minds.* NET

God's judgments are correct

Rev 16:7 And I heard the altar saying, *"Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"* ESV

God judges and repays people according to what they have done

Rom 2:5–8 [Paul:] But because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, *when God's righteous judgment will be revealed*. [6]For *he will repay everyone according to what that person has done:* [7]*eternal life to those who strive for glory, honor, and immortality by patiently doing*

good; [8]*but wrath and fury for those who in their selfish pride refuse to believe the truth and practice wickedness instead.* ISV

God gives fair warning of punishment for not obeying him . . .

Jer 6:7–8 [God, speaking of Jerusalem:] As a well continually pours out fresh water so it continually pours out wicked deeds. Sounds of violence and destruction echo throughout it. All I see are sick and wounded people.' [8]So *take warning, Jerusalem, or I will abandon you in disgust and make you desolate, a place where no one can live.* NET

Jer 11:7 [God, to the people of Judah:] For *I solemnly warned your ancestors to obey me. I warned them again and again, ever since I delivered them out of Egypt until this very day.* NET

. . . Thus God allows for repentance and for punishment to be averted

Jer 18:7–8 [God:] *There are times, Jeremiah, when I threaten to uproot, tear down, and destroy a nation or kingdom.* [8]*But if that nation I threatened stops doing wrong, I will cancel the destruction I intended to do to it.* NET

What is said here regarding nations is also applicable to individuals.

d) God's Judgment Reveals God

Note that in addition to the attributes of God that are revealed by his judgment discussed in this section, earlier subsections show that God's judgment reveals his righteousness, justice and complete knowledge.

God makes himself known by his judgment

Ezek 35:11b [God, to the people of Edom:] I will deal with you according to your anger, and according to your envy, by which you acted spitefully against them. *I will reveal myself to them when I judge you.* NET

God's judgment shows his might and his sovereignty . . .

Jer 16:21a The Lord said, "So I will now let this wicked people know – *I will let them know my mighty power in judgment.* NET

Ps 83:17–18 [A psalmist, to God:] *May they be humiliated and continually terrified! May they die in shame!* [18]*Then they will know that you alone are the Lord, the sovereign king over all the earth.* NET

The psalmist asks that God would enact his judgment on wicked nations (v. 17), showing his sovereignty over all the earth (v. 18).

. . . God's judgment makes known that he is the Lord

Ezek 7:4 [God, to sinful Israel:] My eye will not pity you; I will not spare you. For *I will hold you responsible for your behavior, and you will suffer the consequences of your abominable practices. Then you will know that I am the Lord!* NET

God's judgment makes known that he is the Lord – the only true God, the supreme being who has power over all people and all creation.

God's judgment evidences his glory

Ezek 39:21 [God:] *I will show my glory among the nations. All the nations will see my power when I punish them.* NCV™

God's judgment reveals his holiness

Isa 5:16 But the Lord Almighty shows his greatness by doing what is right, and *he reveals his holiness by judging his people.* GNT

God would show himself to be holy by his righteous judgment on evildoers amongst his people.

God's judgment displays his anger

Mic 5:15 [God:] And *in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.* ESV

Note: God's restraint of his judgment shows his mercy and love

Jonah 3:10; 4:2b *When God saw that the people had stopped doing evil things, he had pity and did not destroy them as he had planned.. ...* [4:2]*...* [Jonah, to God:] *You are a kind and merciful God,*

and you are very patient. You always show love, and you don't like to punish anyone, not even foreigners. CEV

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

See also:

- *d) The Final Judgment (I): Its Scope and Outcomes*, p. 158
- *e) The Final Judgment (II): The Process*, p. 159

The topic of God's judgment – particularly its manifestation – is often avoided, as it contains much that is anything but "nice". However it contains some of the most awe-inspiring teaching, and even reason for hope for God's people.

a) Means of God's Judicial Retribution

Angels

Ps 78:49 [A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD:] *He inflicted his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, sending destroying angels among them.* ISV

Nature

Ps 105:28–35 *The LORD sent darkness and made the land dark, but the Egyptians turned against what he said.* [29]*So he changed their water into blood and made their fish die.* [30]*Then their country was filled with frogs, even in the bedrooms of their rulers.* [31]*The LORD spoke and flies came, and gnats were everywhere in the country.* [32]*He made hail fall like rain and sent lightning through their land.* [33]*He struck down their grapevines and fig trees, and he destroyed every tree in the country.* [34]*He spoke and grasshoppers came; the locusts were too many to count.* [35]*They ate all the plants in the land and everything the earth produced.* NCV™

Ezek 38:22 [GOD, SPEAKING OF GOG:] *I will judge him with plague and bloodshed. I will rain down on him, his troops and the many peoples who are with him a torrential downpour, hailstones, fire, and brimstone.* NET

Rulers . . .

Rom 13:4 The ruler is God's servant to help you. But if you do wrong, then be afraid. He has the power to punish; *he is God's servant to punish those who do wrong.* NCV™

. . . and nations

Hab 1:6, 12b [GOD:] Look, *I am about to empower the Babylonians, that ruthless and greedy nation. They sweep across the surface of the earth, seizing dwelling places that do not belong to them. …* [12]…[Habakkuk:] *LORD, you have made them your instrument of judgment. Protector, you have appointed them as your instrument of punishment.* NET

God's own people

Ezek 25:14 [GOD:] *I will exact my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel. They will carry out in Edom my anger and rage; they will experience my vengeance, declares the sovereign LORD.* NET

b) Characteristics of God's Judicial Retribution

Note that not all instances of God's judicial retribution display all of the following characteristics – certainly not to the extent of which they are spoken of here. Much of the judgment spoken of in this section is conclusive in its purpose, bringing the finality of death – as opposed to God's disciplinary judgment.

Awesome power . . .

Jer 25:31–32 *The sounds of battle will resound to the ends of the earth. For the LORD will bring charges against the nations. He will pass judgment on all humankind and will hand the wicked over to be killed in war.' The LORD so affirms it!* [32]*The LORD who rules over all says, 'Disaster will soon come on one nation after another. A mighty storm of military destruction is rising up from the distant parts of the earth.'* NET

The "mighty storm" (v. 32) denotes a very powerful force – the Babylonians – and/or its destructive effects.

. . . and irresistible

Rev 6:16b–17 [Ungodly people:] "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, [17]for *the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?*" ESV

Inescapable

Jer 11:11 So *I, the Lord, say this: 'I will soon bring disaster on them which they will not be able to escape!* When they cry out to me for help, I will not listen to them. NET

Rom 2:3 [Paul:] And *do you think, whoever you are, when you judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape God's judgment?* NET

Terrifying . . .

Nah 2:10 *Destruction, devastation, and desolation! Their hearts faint, their knees tremble, each stomach churns, each face turns pale!* NET

Heb 10:26–27 For if we choose to go on sinning after we have received the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, [27]but only *a terrifying prospect of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God*. ISV

. . . causing great grief and anguish

Jer 4:8, 19 [Jeremiah, to the people of Judah:] So *put on sackcloth! Mourn and wail, saying, 'The fierce anger of the Lord has not turned away from us!'" ...* [19]*I said, "Oh, the feeling in the pit of my stomach! I writhe in anguish. Oh, the pain in my heart! My heart pounds within me. I cannot keep silent. For I hear the sound of the trumpet; the sound of the battle cry pierces my soul!* NET

Horrific consequences . . .

Ezek 32:4–6 [God, concerning Pharaoh:] *I will leave you on the ground, I will fling you on the open field, I will allow all the birds of the sky to settle on you, and I will permit all the wild animals to gorge themselves on you.* [5]*I will put your flesh on the mountains, and fill the valleys with your maggot–infested carcass.* [6]*I will drench the land with the flow of your blood up to the mountains, and the ravines will be full of your blood.* NET

. . . even complete devastation

Jer 4:23–26 [Jeremiah:] *I looked at the land and saw that it was an empty wasteland. I looked up at the sky, and its light had vanished.* [24]*I looked at the mountains and saw that they were shaking. All the hills were swaying back and forth!* [25]*I looked and saw that there were no more people, and that all the birds in the sky had flown away.* [26]*I looked and saw that the fruitful land had become a desert and that all of the cities had been laid in ruins. The Lord had brought this all about because of his blazing anger.* NET

c) The Wicked and God's Pending Judgment

The wicked prosper

Ps 73:3–5, 12 [A psalmist:] For I envied those who are proud, as *I observed the prosperity of the wicked.* [4]*For they suffer no pain; their bodies are strong and well–fed.* [5]*They are immune to the trouble common to men; they do not suffer as other men do. ...* [12]*Take a good look! This is what the wicked are like, those who always have it so easy and get richer and richer.* NET

God shows goodness to the wicked – even their prosperity ultimately comes from him

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of *the Most High, because he is kind to ungrateful and evil people*. NET

Job 22:18 But *it was he* [God] *who filled their houses with good things* – yet the counsel of the wicked was far from me. NET

Questioning of God's apparent lack of judgment regarding the wicked

Jer 12:1 [JEREMIAH:] LORD, you have always been fair whenever I have complained to you. However, *I would like to speak with you about the disposition of justice. Why are wicked people successful? Why do all dishonest people have such easy lives?* NET

Job 24:1a, 12 *Why are times* [for judgment] *not appointed by the Almighty? ...* [12]*From the city the dying groan, and the wounded cry out for help, but God charges no one with wrongdoing.* NET

However, the situation of the wicked is precarious

Job 24:22b–23 *These people* [the wicked] *may prosper, but they will never feel secure about life.* [23]*God may let them feel confident and self-reliant, but his eyes are on their ways.* GW

God does not leave the guilty unpunished

Nah 1:3 The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; *the LORD will certainly not allow the wicked to go unpunished*. He marches out in the whirlwind and the raging storm; dark storm clouds billow like dust under his feet. NET

In due time God does take action . . .

Deut 32:35 [GOD:] *To me belong vengeance and recompense. In due time their feet will slip, because their time of calamity is near and the things prepared for them draw near.* ISV

. . . God's silence in the face of wickedness is followed by his judgment

Isa 42:13–14 *The LORD will march out like a strong soldier; he will be excited like a man ready to fight a war. He will shout out the battle cry and defeat his enemies.* [14]*The LORD says, "For a long time I have said nothing; I have been quiet and held myself back. But now I will cry out and strain like a woman giving birth to a child.* NCV™

God destroys the wicked

Ps 94:23 *He will pay them back for their sin. He will destroy them because of their evil; the LORD our God will destroy them.* NET

Note: "The day of the Lord" will bring God's judgment, with its destruction of the wicked

Isa 13:6, 9–13 *Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! ...* [9]*Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.* [10]For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. [11]*I* [God] *will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.* [12]*I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.* [13]*Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.* ESV

> Passages such as this that refer to "the day of the LORD" largely speak of a time of God's intervention and judgment – usually in what was then the near future or at the end of the age, or with links to both. It is generally understood by Christians that prophecies of "the day of the LORD" – or of such a "day" of God's reckoning – will be consummately fulfilled at the end of the age.

d) Repayments for the Wicked and the Righteous

> In the Bible, the term "the righteous" basically denotes God's people, those who live in accordance with God's laws and will. The OT particularly often contrasts the wicked and their circumstances with the righteous and their circumstances.

Some of the following contrasting repayments for the wicked and the righteous are natural or intrinsic outcomes of their actions. Other outcomes are spoken of as being directly due to God's intervention and judgment.

Bear in mind that OT verses often speak of what were ramifications of wickedness/disobedience and blessings of righteousness/obedience under the first covenant. Generally these have a spiritual application under the new covenant and also an application to the afterlife. Also note that verses from OT wisdom literature speaking of outcomes of wickedness and righteousness often contain what are considered to be generalizations.

The wicked reap what they sow, brought down by their own evil

Job 4:8 [ELIPHAZ:] Even as I have seen, *those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble reap the same.* NET

Prov 21:7 *The violence done by the wicked will drag them away* because they refuse to do what is right. NET

In contrast to the wicked, the righteous reap what is good

Prov 11:18, 30 *The wicked person earns deceitful wages, but the one who sows righteousness reaps a genuine reward. …* [30]*The fruit of the righteous is like a tree producing life,* and the one who wins souls is wise. NET

The wicked person's wages are probably described as "deceitful" (v. 18) because although they at first seem fine, they can bring trouble (cf. 15:6) and do not last. "The fruit of the righteous" (v. 30) refers to what their lives produce.

God blesses the righteous

Ps 5:12 For *you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.* ESV

God takes care of the righteous, in contrast to the wicked

Ps 1:6 *The righteous are guided and protected by the LORD, but the evil are on the way to their doom.* GNT

Matt 6:31–33 So then, *don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'* [32]For the unconverted pursue these things, and *your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* [33]*But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* NET

The future of the righteous contrasts with the end of the wicked . . .

Ps 112:6–10 For *he* [a righteous person] *will never be upended; others will always remember one who is just.* [7]*He does not fear bad news. He is confident; he trusts in the LORD.* [8]*His resolve is firm; he will not succumb to fear before he looks in triumph on his enemies.* [9]*He generously gives to the needy; his integrity endures. He will be vindicated and honored.* [10]*When the wicked see this, they will worry; they will grind their teeth in frustration and melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish.* NET

Prov 24:16 *Although a righteous person may fall seven times, he gets up again, but the wicked will be brought down by calamity.* NET

. . . This will be most evident in the afterlife

Mal 3:16–18 Then those [in Israel] who respected the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD took notice. A scroll was prepared before him in which were recorded the names of *those who respected the LORD and honored his name.* [17]*"They will belong to me," says the LORD who rules over all, "in the day when I prepare my own special property. I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.* [18]*Then once more you will see that I make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not.* NET

Matt 13:40–43 *As the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the age.* [41]*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes sin as well as all lawbreakers.* [42]*They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* [43]*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.* The one who has ears had better listen! NET

e) Epilogue: God's Judgment of Israel – and His Mercy

Many times God warned his wayward people, through his prophets

2Ki 17:13 *The LORD solemnly warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and all the seers, "Turn back from your evil ways; obey my commandments and rules that are recorded in the law. I ordered your ancestors to keep this law and sent my servants the prophets to remind you of its demands."* NET

Eventually God determined to bring destruction on unresponsive Israel

Jer 15:6–7 [GOD:] *My people, you abandoned me and walked away. I am tired of showing mercy; that's why I'll destroy you* [7]*by scattering you like straw blown by the wind. I will punish you with sorrow and death, because you refuse to change your ways.* CEV

The temple and Jerusalem were destroyed

2Ki 25:8–10 On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the royal guard who served the king of Babylon, arrived in Jerusalem. [9]*He burned down the LORD's temple, the royal palace, and all the houses in Jerusalem, including every large house.* [10]*The whole Babylonian army that came with the captain of the royal guard tore down the walls that surrounded Jerusalem.* NET

Dan 9:12 [DANIEL, TO GOD:] You said these things would happen to us and our leaders, and you made them happen; *you brought on us a great disaster. Nothing has ever been done on earth like what was done to Jerusalem.* NCV™

God's judgment on unfaithful Israel culminated in exile from the promised land

2Ki 17:22–23 *The Israelites followed in the sinful ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat and did not repudiate them.* [23]*Finally the LORD rejected Israel just as he had warned he would do through all his servants the prophets. Israel was deported from its land to Assyria and remains there to this very day.* NET

1Chr 9:1b *The people of Judah were carried away to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness.* NET

> Note that the two Israelite kingdoms were conquered at different times. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, who captured the main city of Samaria in 722 B.C. Later the Babylonians destroyed the southern kingdom of Judah, with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. On both occasions the conquering nations exiled the Israelite people.

But, God promised to spare a remnant of Israel

2Ki 19:30–31 [ISAIAH, SPEAKING A MESSAGE FROM GOD:] *Those who remain in Judah will take root in the ground and bear fruit.* [31]*For a remnant will leave Jerusalem; survivors will come out of Mount Zion. The intense devotion of the sovereign LORD to his people will accomplish this.* NET

God also promised to return people of Israel to the land

Ezek 20:41–42 [GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] *When I bring you out from the nations and gather you from the lands where you are scattered*, I will accept you along with your soothing aroma. I will display my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. [42]Then you will know that I am the LORD *when I bring you to the land of Israel, to the land I swore to give to your fathers.* NET

Jews did return to the land

Ezra 2:1 *Here is a list of descendants of the province of Judah who returned from the captivity, from those who had been exiled. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken them to Babylon. They came back to Jerusalem and Judah, each one to his town, ...* ISV

After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, descendants of the southern Israelite kingdom of Judah did return to the land – and rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem's walls. They were known as "Jews", the term coming from the name "Judah".

Note: Because God remembers his covenant with Abraham, God is merciful to Israel

2Ki 13:22–23a Now King Hazael of Syria oppressed Israel throughout Jehoahaz's reign.

[23]But *the* LORD *had mercy on them and felt pity for them. He extended his favor to them because of the promise he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

Unit C

God and the World:

Jesus Christ

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CHAPTER 11

God’s Promised Messiah

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I. The Messiah's Identity

The OT Scriptures speak of a leader chosen and sent by God to save his people and to reign forever. This leader is known as the "Christ" or the "Messiah" – which are Greek and Hebrew terms respectively, meaning the "anointed" or the "Anointed One". In NT times the Jews looked forward to the Messiah's coming and many still do today. But the NT provides compelling evidence that this Messiah was in fact Jesus Christ.

Note that this chapter is in a sense a prologue to the whole of *Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ*, as Jesus being the Christ or Messiah undergirds many of the topics.

a) The Promise of a Messiah in OT Scripture

The OT Scriptures speak of a coming anointed one of God . . .

Dan 9:25a [The archangel Gabriel, to Daniel:] So know and understand: From the issuing of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem *until an anointed one, a prince arrives*, there will be a period of seven weeks and sixty–two weeks. NET

Regarding the "weeks", many scholars understand the term to denote seven years.

. . . The anointed one would have God's Spirit

Isa 61:1 [The Messiah:] *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me* to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; … ESV

These words are prophetically attributed to the Messiah.

The OT describes him as a remarkable chosen servant of God

Isa 42:1a *The Lord says, "Here is my servant, whom I strengthen—the one I have chosen*, with whom I am pleased. GNT

Isa 52:13 [God:] *The Lord says: My servant will succeed! He will be given great praise and the highest honors.* CEV

The OT promises that such a one would arise as a great ruler of Israel

Mic 5:2 [God:] As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, seemingly insignificant among the clans of Judah – *from you a king will emerge who will rule over Israel on my behalf, one whose origins are in the distant past.* NET

Num 24:17–18 [Balaam:] *I see someone who will come some day, someone who will come, but not soon. A star will come from Jacob; a ruler will rise from Israel. He will crush the heads of the Moabites and smash the skulls of the sons of Sheth.* [18]*Edom will be conquered; his enemy Edom will be conquered, but Israel will grow wealthy.* NCV™

This prophecy may have been initially fulfilled in David, but probably primarily or ultimately refers to the promised, divinely appointed leader. It speaks of him crushing renowned enemies of Israel, often used to symbolize her enemies in general.

The OT says the ruler will bring justice and salvation to the nations

Isa 42:3–4 [God:] He will not break off a bent reed or put out a flickering lamp. *He will bring lasting justice to all.* [4]He will not lose hope or courage; *he will establish justice on the earth*. Distant lands eagerly wait for his teaching. GNT

Isa 49:6b [God, as speaking to the Messiah:] *I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* ESV

The ruler would be a descendant of King David, in accordance with God's promise to David

Ps 132:11, 17–18 *The Lord swore an oath to David. This is a truth he will not take back: "I will set one of your own descendants on your throne.* … [17]There *I will make a horn sprout up for David. I will prepare a lamp for my anointed one.* [18]*I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown on my anointed one will shine."* GW

The "horn" and "lamp" (v. 17) speak of the strength ("horn") and continuation ("lamp") of David's dynasty, and would be embodied by the Messiah.

The OT also says that he would suffer and die, for people's sins – but then be raised and exalted

Isa 53:5–6 *He was wounded for our rebellious acts. He was crushed for our sins. He was punished so that we could have peace, and we received healing from his wounds.* [6]*We have all strayed like sheep. Each one of us has turned to go his own way, and the* LORD *has laid all our sins on him.* GW

Isa 53:10–12 But *it was the* LORD *who decided to crush him and make him suffer. The* LORD *made his life a penalty offering, but he will still see his descendants and live a long life.* He will complete the things the LORD wants him to do. [11]*"After his soul suffers many things, he will see life and be satisfied. My good servant will make many people right with God; he will carry away their sins.* [12]*For this reason I* [God] *will make him a great man among people, and he will share in all things with those who are strong. He willingly gave his life and was treated like a criminal. But he carried away the sins of many people and asked forgiveness for those who sinned."* NCV™

> These verses speak in part of God raising his messianic servant to life, following his death. The term "his descendants" (v. 10b) is understood to refer to the messianic servant's spiritual descendants – those who would be given life through him. Note that Isaiah 52:13–53:12 has been called "the gospel in the OT" and is quoted in the NT more than any other OT passage.

b) Jesus Is the Promised Messiah

> Bear in mind that in his first advent, or coming, Jesus Christ did not come as an all-conquering ruler, which is how the Messiah is depicted in much of OT messianic prophecy. The NT indicates that this aspect of messianic prophecy will be fulfilled on Jesus Christ's second coming.

Jesus Christ is the one chosen by God

Luke 9:35 Then a voice came from the cloud, saying, *"This is my Son, my Chosen One.* Listen to him!" NET

> The voice is considered to be God's voice, speaking about Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the one anointed by God, with the Holy Spirit . . .

Acts 10:38a [PETER:] You know that *God anointed Jesus from Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.* GW

> The descending of the Holy Spirit onto Jesus at his baptism (cf. Matt 3:16–17) was God's anointing of Jesus for his mission. It is also understood to mark Jesus as the Messiah – the "Anointed One" – and fulfilled OT prophecies that God would bestow his Spirit on the Messiah (cf. Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1).

. . . Jesus is the Messiah

Acts 3:19–20 [PETER, TO A CROWD OF LARGELY JEWS:] Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, [20]so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he may send *the Messiah appointed for you – that is, Jesus.* NET

The OT Scriptures testify to Jesus being the Messiah, the Christ

Acts 18:28 For with his strong arguments he [Apollos] defeated the Jews in public debates by *proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.* GNT

For the OT speaks of the sufferings and resurrection of the Christ as fulfilled in Jesus . . .

Acts 17:2–3 Paul went to the Jews in the synagogue, as he customarily did, and on three Sabbath days *he addressed them from the scriptures,* [3]*explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."* NET

. . . and the OT speaks of the messianic salvation that would come through Jesus Christ

Luke 1:69–70 [ZECHARIAH, SPEAKING OF WHAT GOD HAD DONE:] *He has raised up a mighty Savior for us in the family of his servant David.* [70]*He made this promise through his holy prophets long ago.* GW

Acts 10:43 *About him* [Jesus Christ] *all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.* NET

Luke 1:69–70 refers to the messianic salvation prophesied in the writings of the prophets (v. 70) as coming through Jesus, who was from the family line of David (v. 69). Acts 10:43 states that the prophets testify that the forgiveness of sins, a key aspect of this salvation, comes through Jesus Christ.

c) Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which prophecies are spoken of as being fulfilled by Jesus Christ. One is that prophecies or predictions were accomplished or came true in Jesus' life. The other is that aspects of his life have marked parallels in OT Scripture which they thus fulfill in the sense that they correspond to them and reveal a deeper, more complete meaning in them.

The following subsections contain examples of prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. There are numerous other ones.

Prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' birth and early years

Matt 2:1–6 After *Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea,* in the time of King Herod, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem [2]saying, "Where is the one who is born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." [3]When King Herod heard this he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4]After assembling all the chief priests and experts in the law, *he asked them where the Christ was to be born.* [5]*"In Bethlehem of Judea," they said, "for it is written this way by the prophet:* [6]*'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are in no way least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"* NET

Matt 2:13–15 After they [the wise men] had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to look for the child to kill him." [14]*Then he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and went to Egypt.* [15]*He stayed there until Herod died. In this way what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled: "I called my Son out of Egypt."* NET

Prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' life and ministry

Matt 8:16–17 In the evening the people brought him [Jesus] many who were possessed by demons. *He forced the evil spirits out of people with a command and cured everyone who was sick.* [17]*So what the prophet Isaiah had said came true: "He took away our weaknesses and removed our diseases."* GW

Luke 4:16b–21 He [Jesus, in a synagogue] stood up to read, [17]and *the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,* [18]*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,* [19]*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* [20]Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. [21]*Then he began to tell them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read."* NET

Jesus' claim to fulfill the messianic prophecy of one who would be anointed by God with the Holy Spirit to carry out God's messianic work (vv. 18–19) was supported by his proclamation of the good news of God's salvation and in his healing works, whereby he liberated people from various kinds of bondage. The release from sin that Jesus would accomplish was a further aspect of his fulfillment of this prophecy.

Prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' death

John 19:31–37 Then, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not stay on the crosses on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was an especially important one), the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to have the victims' legs broken and the bodies taken down. [32]So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men who had been crucified with Jesus, first the one and then the other. [33]But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, *they did not break his legs.* [34]*But one of the soldiers pierced his side*

with a spear, and blood and water flowed out immediately. [35]And the person who saw it has testified (and his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth), so that you also may believe. [36]*For these things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled, "Not a bone of his will be broken."* [37]*And again another scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."* NET

1Pet 2:21–25 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] This is, in fact, what you were called to do, because *the Messiah also suffered for you* and left an example for you to follow in his steps. [22]*"He never committed a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."* [23]*When he was insulted, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he did not threaten but made it his habit to commit the matter to the one who judges fairly.* [24]*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree*, so that we might die to those sins and live for righteousness. *By his wounds you have been healed.* [25]*For you were like sheep that kept going astray*, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. ISV

This passage draws heavily from Isaiah 53, indicative of Jesus having fulfilled what is a monumental messianic prophecy.

Prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection

Acts 2:30–32 [PETER:] Therefore, since he [David] was a prophet and knew that God had promised him with an oath to put one of his descendants on his throne, [31]*he looked ahead and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ: 'He was not abandoned to Hades, and his flesh did not experience decay.'* [32]*It was this very Jesus whom God raised, and of that we are all witnesses.* ISV

"Hades" was a name given to the place of the dead, sometimes translated as "the grave".

d) Further Testimony to Jesus Being the Messiah

Jesus' deeds showed that he is the Messiah, the Christ

John 20:30–31 *Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* [31]*But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that by believing you may have life in his name. NET

Jesus himself claimed to be the Christ

John 4:25–26 The woman said to him, *"I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ)*; "whenever he comes, he will tell us everything." [26]*Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."* NET

Jesus' followers acknowledged him as the Christ . . .

John 1:41, 45 He [Andrew] first found his own brother Simon and told him, *"We have found the Messiah!" (which is translated Christ).* ... [45]Philip found Nathanael and told him, *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* NET

. . . and Jesus being the Christ was a central aspect of their teaching

Acts 5:42 And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, *they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ.* NET

Acts 9:22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by *proving that Jesus was the Christ.* ESV

Others also acknowledged Jesus as the Christ

Matt 21:9 *The crowds that went ahead of him* [Jesus, as he rode into Jerusalem] *and those following kept shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!* Hosanna in the highest!" NET

The crowd was acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, referring to him with messianic expressions in declaring him "the Son of David" and the one "who comes in the name of the Lord".

Note: The Christ is understood to be the Son of God

Matt 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are *the Christ, the Son of the living God*." NET

Matt 26:63b The high priest said to him [Jesus], "I charge you under oath by the living God, tell us if you are *the Christ, the Son of God*." NET

Bear in mind that here it is the high priest who speaks of the Christ as being the Son of God. As such this correlation is not a uniquely Christian teaching. Note that it appears to be largely based on OT messianic passages where God speaks of the Messiah as his Son (cf. 2Sam 7:11b–14a; Ps 2:6–7; 89:27).

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person

Arguably the fundamental assertion of the NT is that God sent the Messiah – Jesus Christ – into the world to save people from sin and its devastating consequences. For this mission, Jesus Christ was born of the Holy Spirit and became fully human – further assertions that are very significant to the Christian faith. In fulfilling the objectives of the mission, Jesus Christ lived a life which was faultless, with his character being both exemplary and inspiring. The following teaching shows the NT's testimony to these crucial matters.

a) Jesus Christ's Mission from God

God sent Jesus Christ into the world

John 5:36 [Jesus, to the Jews:] But I have a testimony greater than that from John. For *the deeds that the Father has assigned me to complete – the deeds I am now doing – testify about me that the Father has sent me.* NET

John 10:36b [Jesus:] *I am the one God chose and sent into the world.* NCV™

God sent Jesus to take away sins . . .

1Jn 3:5a You know that *Christ came to take away sins.* CEV

. . . God sent Jesus to save the world

John 3:17 For *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.* NET

Luke 19:10 For *the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.* NET

Saving the world from sin was arguably the key objective of Jesus Christ's mission. The following subsections speak of other important objectives of Jesus Christ's mission, that were to be accomplished in conjunction with saving the world from sin.

Jesus came to bring spiritual light into the world . . .

John 12:46 [Jesus:] *I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me will not remain in the darkness.* ISV

. . . Jesus came to bring truth

John 18:37b [Jesus:] *For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world – to testify to the truth.* Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. NET

Jesus came to enable us to know God

1Jn 5:20a And *we know that the Son of God has come and has given us insight to know him who is true,* and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. NET

Jesus came to destroy Satan's work

1Jn 3:8 The devil has been sinning since the beginning, so anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil. *The Son of God came for this purpose: to destroy the devil's work.* NCV™

The "devil's work", which Jesus Christ came to destroy, involves people's sin – as pointed to by the first statement here and by v. 5 ("...Christ came to take away sins..."). As such it also encompasses the results of sin – such as separation from God, enslavement to sin, and death.

Further objectives of Jesus Christ's mission

See also:

- *T*, p. 150

Luke 4:43 But *Jesus said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, for that is what I was sent to do."* NET

John 10:10 [Jesus:] A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but *I came to give life—life in all its fullness.* NCV™

Note: Jesus Christ's mission took place at a time chosen by God

Gal 4:4–5 But *when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son.* He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law, [5]to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's sons and daughters. GNT

The phrase "when the right time finally came" (v. 4) parallels "the time set by his father" (cf. v. 2), implying that God had set the time of Jesus' mission.

b) Jesus Christ's Humanity

See also:

▪ *a) Jesus Christ Is the Son of God (I): General*, p. 28

This and the following section speak of Jesus Christ's person in his mission. The section cross-referenced above is complimentary to this section in that it encompasses Jesus Christ's divine nature.

Jesus Christ became a human being

Rom 8:3b By *sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh* and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, … NET

God sent Jesus Christ "in a human body like ours" (NLT).

Jesus was born, of Mary – after being conceived through the Holy Spirit

Matt 1:18–25 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.* [19]Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately. [20]When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because *the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.* [21]*She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins." [22]*This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled:* [23]*"Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel," which means "God with us."* [24]When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. *He took his wife,* [25]*but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.* NET

Jesus was a descendant of David

2Tim 2:8 Remember *Jesus Christ*, who was raised from death, *who was a descendant of David*, as is taught in the Good News I preach. GNT

Jesus had family

Matt 13:55–56a [PEOPLE OF JESUS' HOMETOWN, REFERRING TO JESUS:] *Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother named Mary? And aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas?* [56]*And aren't all his sisters here with us?* NET

Jesus grew from childhood through to adulthood

Luke 2:40–42 And *the child* [Jesus] *grew and became strong*, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him. [41]Now Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover. [42]*When he was twelve years old*, they went up according to custom. NET

Luke 2:52 *Jesus became wiser and grew physically.* People liked him, and he pleased God. NCV™

Jesus was called a man

Acts 2:22 [PETER:] Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! *Jesus from Nazareth was a man* accredited to you by God through miracles, wonders, and signs that God performed through him among you, as you yourselves know. ISV

Jesus had a physical body . . .

Col 1:22a [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now Christ has brought you back to God by dying in *his physical body*. GW

. . . and Jesus had physical limitations

Matt 21:18 Now early in the morning, as he returned to the city, *he was hungry*. NET

John 4:6a Jacob's well was there, so *Jesus, since he was tired from the journey*, sat right down beside the well. NET

Like all humans, Jesus experienced difficult times – including temptation

John 11:33–35 When Jesus saw her [Martha, whose brother had died] weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, *he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled*. [34]And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." [35]*Jesus wept.* ESV

Heb 4:15 [The writer, to believers:] For we do not have a high priest [Christ] incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but *one who has been tempted in every way just as we are*, yet without sin. NET

Note: Jesus' humanity was vital to his mission to save people

Heb 2:14–18 Therefore, *since the children share in flesh and blood, he* [Jesus] *likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil),* [15]*and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death.* [16]For surely his concern is not for angels, but *he is concerned for Abraham's descendants.* [17]*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.* [18]*For since he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.* NET

> Jesus needed to share in the humanity of God's people and become like them so as to be identified with them, in a sense being one with them. As such he could die as a substitute and an offering for them. Partaking of their humanity would also be important for him in his ongoing role in helping God's people, as indicated in v. 18 and possibly also in view in v. 17.

c) Jesus Christ's Personality

See also:

- *c) Jesus Christ's Character*, p. 25

Jesus was loving – shown ultimately in him giving up his life

John 15:9, 12–13 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; remain in my love.* … [12]My commandment is this – to *love one another just as I have loved you.* [13]*No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends.* NET

Jesus was compassionate

Matt 9:36 *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* NET

Jesus was meek

1Pet 2:23 *When he was maligned, he did not answer back; when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation*, but committed himself to God who judges justly. NET

Jesus was gentle and humble – as a servant

Matt 11:29 [Jesus:] Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because *I am gentle and humble in heart*, and you will find rest for your souls. NET

Luke 22:27 [Jesus, to his disciples:] For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? *But I am among you as one who serves.* NET

Jesus was good

John 10:11 [Jesus:] *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* NET

Jesus was righteous

1Pet 3:18a For *Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous*, that he might bring us to God, … ESV

Jesus showed righteous anger and indignation

John 2:14–16 He found in the temple courts those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at tables. [15]*So he made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple courts, with the sheep and the oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.* [16]*To those who sold the doves he said, "Take these things away from here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!"* NET

Jesus was courageous and composed

John 18:3–11 So Judas obtained a squad of soldiers and some officers of the chief priests and Pharisees. They came to the orchard with lanterns and torches and weapons. [4]*Then Jesus, because he knew everything that was going to happen to him, came and asked them, "Who are you looking for?"* [5]*They replied, "Jesus the Nazarene." He told them, "I am he."* (Now Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing there with them.) [6]So when Jesus said to them, "I am he," they retreated and fell to the ground. [7]*Then Jesus asked them again, "Who are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene."* [8]*Jesus replied, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, let these men go."* [9]He said this to fulfill the word he had spoken, "I have not lost a single one of those whom you gave me." [10]Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, pulled it out and struck the high priest's slave, cutting off his right ear. (Now the slave's name was Malchus.) [11]But *Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath! Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"* NET

Note: Jesus was prepared to associate with notably sinful people

Luke 15:2 But the Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining [about Jesus], "*This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.*" NET

In his mission to save the world from sin, Jesus reached out to sinners – in particular those who recognized themselves as such. These included groups of people looked down upon as "sinners" by the self-righteous members of society. Associating with and supporting such people showed Jesus' love and compassion. These actions also reflected his strength of character, with him not being influenced by or giving in to social norms and the pressure of public opinion.

d) Epilogue: God Works through Jesus Christ

See also:

- *God made and sustains all things through Jesus Christ*, p. 56
- *I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ*, p. 126
- *b) God Works in His People through the Holy Spirit*, p. 183

God works in all eras through Jesus Christ, impacting all things everywhere

Heb 1:2 But now *in these last days God has spoken to us through his Son.* God has chosen his Son to own all things, and *through him he made the world.* NCV™

Col 1:20 *Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.* GNT

Rom 2:16 [PAUL:] And so, according to the Good News I preach, this is how it will be *on that Day when God through Jesus Christ will judge the secret thoughts of all.* GNT

God enacts his will in or through Jesus Christ

Gal 1:3–4 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Grace and peace to you from God the Father and *our Lord Jesus Christ,* [4]*who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, …* NET

Eph 1:9–10 God did what he had purposed, and made known to us *the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ.* [10]*This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.* GNT

Bear in mind that the teaching in this and the previous subsection is not necessarily indicating that God works or enacts his will exclusively through Jesus Christ. The Bible also speaks of God working

through the Holy Spirit and through his people – although this does not mean that Jesus Christ is not also involved in such work.

God fulfills his promises through Jesus Christ . . .

2Cor 1:20a For *all God's promises are "Yes" in him.* ISV

All God's promises are confirmed in Jesus Christ; they are "fulfilled in him" (NLT).

. . . Key promises of God have been centered on Jesus Christ

Acts 13:23 From the descendants of this man [David] *God brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, just as he promised.* NET

Rom 1:2–3 *The Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets, as written in the Holy Scriptures.* [3]*It is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ …* GNT

2Tim 1:1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. God sent me to tell about *the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.* NCV™ ®

God saves people through Jesus Christ

John 3:16–17 For *this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* [17]*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.* NET

God gave the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ

Titus 3:6 [PAUL, TO TITUS:] *God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour, …* GNT

God works in and through his people, through Jesus Christ

Heb 13:21 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] May this God of peace prepare you to do every good thing he wants. *May he work in us through Jesus Christ to do what is pleasing to him.* Glory belongs to Jesus Christ forever. Amen. GW

The first sentence suggests that the second is speaking at least as much of the work he does through us (impacting others) as of that which he does in us (impacting our own spiritual lives).

CHAPTER 12

Jesus Christ’s Mission

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I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ

God enabled Jesus Christ to carry out his mission, empowering and directing him. Consequently what Jesus did and said showed that he had been sent and empowered by God. For without God no one could possibly have the extraordinary authority, power and knowledge that Jesus had.

a) Jesus Christ's Authority from God

See also:

- *b) Jesus Christ's Power from God*, p. 126
- *d) Jesus Christ as Lord of All*, p. 153

God granted Jesus sovereign authority

Matt 11:27a [Jesus:] *All things have been handed over to me by my Father.* NET

John 17:2 For *you* [God] *have given him authority over all humanity* so that he might give eternal life to all those you gave him. ISV

Jesus had the authority to forgive sins

Matt 9:5–8 [Jesus, to teachers of the law:] *Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? 6But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – then he said to the paralytic – "Stand up, take your stretcher, and go home."* 7And he stood up and went home. 8When the crowd saw this, *they were afraid and honored God who had given such authority to men.* NET

Jesus' question in v. 5 makes the point that forgiving sins is, like healing a paralytic, humanly impossible. So although his claim to be able to forgive sins could not be directly verified, by proving he could do the latter (vv. 7–8) he gave his claim credence.

Jesus' teaching had great authority

Mark 1:21b–27 On the next day of worship, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22*The people were amazed at his teachings. Unlike their scribes, he taught them with authority.* 23At that time there was a man in the synagogue who was controlled by an evil spirit. He shouted, 24"What do you want with us, Jesus from Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-the Holy One of God!" 25*Jesus ordered the spirit, "Keep quiet, and come out of him!"* 26*The evil spirit threw the man into convulsions and came out of him with a loud shriek.* 27*Everyone was stunned. They said to each other, "What is this? This is a new teaching that has authority behind it! He gives orders to evil spirits, and they obey him."* GW

Jesus had the authority to state what was required for eternal life

John 3:16 [Jesus:] For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that *everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* NET

Jesus had the authority to state what was required to enter God's kingdom

Matt 7:21 [Jesus:] *Not everyone who keeps saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom of heaven, but only the person who keeps doing the will of my Father in heaven.* ISV

John 3:3 *Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again."* GNT

b) Jesus Christ's Power from God

God bestowed the Holy Spirit on Jesus, for his mission

Matt 3:16–17 After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, *the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him.* 17And a voice from heaven said, "This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight." NET

Luke 4:18–19, 21 [Jesus:] "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,* 19*to proclaim the year of the*

Lord's favor." ... [21]*Then he began to tell them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read."* NET

Jesus claimed that the prophecy of one who would be anointed with the Holy Spirit to carry out God's messianic work (vv. 18–19; cf. Isa 61:1–2) was fulfilled in himself. As such, through the Holy Spirit God empowered Jesus in his mission and Jesus performed many miraculous deeds with God's power.

The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus in what he said and did

John 3:34 *The man* [Jesus] *whom God has sent speaks God's message. After all, God gives him the Spirit without limit.* GW

Acts 10:38 *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and he went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him.* ISV

Presumably the power spoken of was due to the Holy Spirit, the power being given in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. This verse also appears to correlate Jesus having the Holy Spirit with God's presence being with him.

Jesus did many miraculous deeds with God's power

Luke 5:17b *The power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick.* GNT

John 3:2 One night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we know you are a teacher sent from God, because *no one can do the miracles you do unless God is with him*." NCV™

Jesus' deeds led people to praise God

Matt 15:30–31 Then large crowds came to him bringing with them the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others. They laid them at his feet, and *he healed them.* [31]*As a result, the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they praised the God of Israel.* NET

The fact that the people praised God for all the miracles that they saw Jesus perform, suggests that they understood his power to perform the miracles ultimately came from God.

Jesus' deeds validated his claims about himself and God

John 10:36–38 [Jesus, to unbelieving Jews:] As for me, *the Father chose me and sent me into the world. How, then, can you say that I blaspheme because I said that I am the Son of God?* [37]*Do not believe me, then, if I am not doing the things my Father wants me to do.* [38]*But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds, in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father.* GNT

In vv. 37–38, Jesus claimed that the miracles validated his claim of being the Christ (v. 36a; cf. vv. 24–25a), God's Son (v. 36b) – and in conjunction showed that God was in him and he in God (v. 38b).

Jesus' deeds led many people to believe in him

John 12:9–11 Now a large crowd of Judeans learned that Jesus was there, and so they came not only because of him but also *to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead*. [10]So the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus too, [11]for *on account of him many of the Jewish people from Jerusalem were going away and believing in Jesus.* NET

c) Jesus Christ's Knowledge from God

See also:

- *J*, p. 131

Jesus Christ's surpassing knowledge and his related trait of profound wisdom were key aspects of his teaching ministry. As can be seen in some of the verses in this section, these capabilities were also important in other areas of his life and mission.

God taught Jesus

John 8:28 Then Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but *I speak just what the Father taught me.* NET

John 15:15b [Jesus, to his disciples:] But I have called you friends, because *I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father.* NET

Jesus taught his disciples everything he learned from God (cf. NIV).

Jesus knew everything

John 16:30 [The disciples, to Jesus:] Now *we know that you know everything* and do not need anyone to ask you anything. Because of this we believe that you have come from God. NET

The final statement suggests that Jesus' knowledge of all things was due to God and/or his relationship with him. Jesus' complete knowledge would appear to have been due to both: God's teaching of him (as per the previous subsection); and, debatably, God enabling him to know or perceive all things about people and everything else (capabilities that are seen in the following subsections).

Jesus knew everything about all people . . .

John 2:24–25 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them [people with limited faith], because *he knew all people.* 25*He did not need anyone to testify about man, for he knew what was in man.* NET

John 4:29 [A woman who had talked with Jesus:] *"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!* Could he be the Messiah?" CEV

. . . Jesus even knew people's thoughts and intentions

Matt 12:25a *Jesus knew what they were thinking,* and he said to them: Any kingdom where people fight each other will end up ruined. CEV

Matt 22:18 But *knowing that these leaders were trying to trick him,* Jesus said, "You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me? NCV™

Jesus knew about future events

Mark 13:19–26 [Jesus:] For *in those days there will be suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, or ever will happen.* 20*And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved. But because of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut them short.* 21Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe him. 22For *false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the elect.* 23Be careful! *I have told you everything ahead of time.* 24*"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light;* 25*the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.* 26*Then everyone will see the Son of Man arriving in the clouds with great power and glory.* NET

John 18:4 Then Jesus, because *he knew everything that was going to happen to him,* came and asked them, "Who are you looking for?" NET

Jesus was also filled with wisdom . . .

Luke 2:40, 46–47, 52 And *the child* [Jesus] *grew and became strong, filled with wisdom,* and the favor of God was upon him. … 46After three days they [Jesus' parents] found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47And *all who heard Jesus were astonished at his understanding and his answers.* … 52*And Jesus increased in wisdom* and in stature, and in favor with God and with people. NET

. . . Nobody could match Jesus' wisdom

Luke 20:22–26 [Men trying to trick Jesus:] Is it right for us to pay the tribute tax to Caesar or not?" 23But *Jesus perceived their deceit and said to them,* 24*"Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?" They said, "Caesar's."* 25*So he said to them, "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* 26*Thus they were unable in the presence of the people to trap him with his own words. And stunned by his answer, they fell silent.* NET

Matt 22:46 *No one could answer him at all, and from that day on no one dared to ask him another question.* ISV

Note: Jesus knew God

John 7:28b–29 [Jesus, referring to God:] *You do not know him,* 29*but I know him, because I have come from him and he sent me.* NET

d) Jesus Christ's Direction from God

God was with Jesus

John 8:29 [Jesus, speaking of God:] And *the one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone*, because I always do those things that please him. NET

Jesus only did works of God . . .

John 5:19 So Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, *the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.* NET

. . . and God worked through Jesus

Acts 2:22 [Peter:] Listen to these words, fellow-Israelites! Jesus of Nazareth was a man whose divine authority was clearly proven to you by *all the miracles and wonders which God performed through him*. You yourselves know this, for it happened here among you. GNT

Jesus obeyed God

John 14:31a [Jesus:] However, I want the world to know that I love the Father and that *I am doing exactly what the Father has commanded me to do*. GW

Jesus carried out God's will, doing the work God had given him . . .

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work*. NET

> In speaking of doing God's will as his "food", Jesus indicated that it was his prime source of "nourishment" (AMP, NLT). Doing God's work was in a sense what sustained him in his mission and was his highest priority.

. . . Jesus sought to do God's will as opposed to his own will

John 6:38 [Jesus:] For *I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me*. NET

Jesus spoke what God wanted him to say

John 12:49–50 [Jesus:] For *I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak*. [50]And I know that his commandment is eternal life. *Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me*. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Ministry, Death and Resurrection

The life Jesus Christ lived has been unparalleled in word and deed. It culminated in his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection by God. How we respond to the NT's testimony to these events and their significance, will determine our eternal destiny.

a) Jesus Christ's Miracles

See also:

- *b) Jesus Christ's Power from God*, p. 126

The earlier section *Jesus Christ's Power from God*, p. 126, also spoke of Jesus' miraculous deeds, in referring to God as the source of Jesus' power. The focus of this section is on Jesus' use of his power in his ministry, which was largely in performing miracles that brought people deliverance from some form of bondage or difficulty. In performing these miracles Jesus demonstrated power over all other forces.

Jesus performed miraculous deeds that greatly amazed people

Mark 7:37 *People were completely astounded and said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.* NET

Jesus delivered people from demons and Satan – demonstrating power over evil

Matt 8:16 When it was evening, *many demon-possessed people were brought to him. He drove out the spirits with a word*, and healed all who were sick. NET

Luke 11:14, 21–22 *Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the man who had been mute began to speak*, and the crowds were amazed. … [21][Jesus:] When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his possessions are safe. [22]But *when a stronger man attacks and conquers him, he takes away the first man's armor on which the man relied and divides up his plunder.* NET

In v. 22 Jesus refers to his own overpowering of Satan – breaking Satan's stranglehold on Satan's earthly domain – a truth demonstrated by Jesus driving out demons (v. 14).

Jesus delivered people from disease and disorders

Matt 4:23–24 Jesus went throughout all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and *healing all kinds of disease and sickness among the people*. [24]So a report about him spread throughout Syria. *People brought to him all who suffered with various illnesses and afflictions, those who had seizures, paralytics, and those possessed by demons, and he healed them.* NET

Jesus even raised the dead

Luke 8:53–55 And they began making fun of him, because *they knew that she was dead.* [54]*But Jesus gently took her by the hand and said, "Child, get up."* [55]*Her spirit returned, and she got up immediately.* Then he told them to give her something to eat. NET

Jesus exercised control over nature, in rescuing and helping people

Mark 4:37–41 *Now a great windstorm developed and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was nearly swamped.* [38]But he was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" [39]So *he got up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Be quiet! Calm down!" Then the wind stopped, and it was dead calm.* [40]And he said to them, "Why are you cowardly? Do you still not have faith?" [41]They were overwhelmed by fear and said to one another, "Who then is this? *Even the wind and sea obey him!*" NET

John 6:9–11 [Andrew, to Jesus:] Here is a boy who has *five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are these for so many people?*" [10]Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." (Now there was a lot of grass in that place.) So the men sat down, *about five thousand in number.* [11]*Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed the bread to those who were seated. He then did the same with the fish, as much as they wanted.* NET

b) Jesus Christ's Teaching

Jesus was a prophet . . .

Luke 24:19b [Two followers, unknowingly speaking to Jesus:] Those things that happened to *Jesus from Nazareth. By what he did and said he showed that he was a powerful prophet*, who pleased God and all the people. CEV

As a prophet Jesus was a representative and spokesperson of God, speaking and acting on God's behalf. His speaking role as a prophet included: teaching, admonishing and prophesying.

. . . As a prophet, Jesus taught and preached to the people

Mark 6:34 As Jesus came ashore he saw the large crowd and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So *he taught them many things*. NET

Matt 11:1 *When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their towns.* NET

Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God

Matt 4:17, 23 From that time *Jesus began to preach this message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."* ... [23]Jesus went throughout all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, *preaching the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing all kinds of disease and sickness among the people. NET

The kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven) was the most prominent theme in Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' teaching was not his own; what he spoke was from God

John 14:24 [Jesus:] Those who do not love me do not obey my teaching. *This teaching that you hear is not really mine; it is from my Father, who sent me.* NCV™

Jesus' teaching is the truth . . .

John 8:31–32 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, "*If you continue to follow my teaching*, you are really my disciples [32]and *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*." NET

. . . Jesus himself is identified with truth

John 14:6 *Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. NET

Jesus did not just simply teach the truth, he is "the truth" – the embodiment of truth.

Jesus' teaching was amazing – leading people to believe in him . . .

Matt 22:33 When the crowds heard this, *they were amazed at his teaching*. NET

John 4:41–42 And *many more believed because of the things he said*. [42]They said to the woman, "First we believed in Jesus because of your speech, but *now we believe because we heard him ourselves. We know that this man really is the Savior of the world*." NCV™

. . . However, many others did not believe Jesus

John 7:5 For *not even his own brothers believed in him*. NET

John 7:48 [The chief priests and Pharisees:] *None of the rulers or the Pharisees have believed in him*, have they? NET

c) Jesus Christ's Rejection and Death

Jesus was rejected

Luke 17:25 But first [before Jesus returns] *he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation*. NET

John 1:11 He came to what was his own, but *his own people did not receive him*. NET

Jesus was rejected by the Jewish people as a whole, but in particular by the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus was despised

John 8:52–53 *Then the people said* [to Jesus], *"Now we are sure that you have a demon.* Abraham is dead, and so are the prophets. How can you say that no one who obeys your words will ever die? [53]Are you greater than our father Abraham? He

died, and so did the prophets. *Who do you think you are?"* CEV

John 15:18 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first.* NET

Jesus faced intense opposition, with efforts to kill him

John 5:16–18 Now *because Jesus was doing these things* [miracles] *on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began persecuting him.* [17]So he told them, "My Father is working until now, and I too am working." [18]For this reason *the Jewish leaders were trying even harder to kill him*, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was also calling God his own Father, thus making himself equal with God. NET

Jesus' betrayal and arrest

Matt 26:45–50 Then he [Jesus] came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is approaching, and *the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.* [46]*Get up, let us go. Look! My betrayer is approaching!"* [47]*While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people.* [48]*(Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him!")* [49]*Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi," and kissed him.* [50]Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." *Then they came and took hold of Jesus and arrested him.* NET

The unjust condemnation of Jesus – who was innocent of any charge

Luke 23:4, 20–24 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, *"I find no basis for an accusation against this man."* ... [20]*Pilate addressed them once again because he wanted to release Jesus.* [21]*But they kept on shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"* [22]*A third time he said to them, "Why? What wrong has he done? I have found him guilty of no crime deserving death.* I will therefore flog him and release him." [23]*But they were insistent, demanding with loud shouts that he be crucified. And their shouts prevailed.* [24]*So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.* NET

The horrific suffering and death of Jesus

Matt 27:26–31, 35, 39–40, 45–46, 50 Then he [Pilate] released Barabbas for them. But *after he had Jesus flogged, he handed him over to be crucified*. [27]Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole cohort around him. [28]*They stripped him and put a scarlet robe around him,* [29]*and after braiding a crown of thorns, they put it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand, and kneeling down before him, they mocked him: "Hail, king of the Jews!"* [30]*They spat on him and took the staff and struck him repeatedly on the head.* [31]*When they had mocked him*, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes back on him. *Then they led him away to crucify him.* ... [35]*When they had crucified him*, they divided his clothes by throwing dice. ... [39]*Those who passed by defamed him, shaking their heads* [40]*and saying, "You who can destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are God's Son, come down from the cross!"* ... [45]Now from noon until three, darkness came over all the land. [46]*At about three o'clock Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* ... [50]*Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.* NET

> In v. 46, Jesus' cry (cf. Ps 22:1) suggests that the intimate relationship between himself and God had in some way or sense been impaired.

Jesus' death was planned . . .

Matt 26:2, 18 [Jesus, to his disciples:] "You know that the day after tomorrow is the day of the Passover Feast. *On that day the Son of Man will be given to his enemies to be crucified."* ... [18]Jesus answered, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: *The chosen time is near.* I will have the Passover with my followers at your house.'" NCV™

. . . It was God's will that Jesus die – for everyone

Acts 2:23 [Peter, to a crowd of largely Jews:] *In accordance with his own plan God had already decided that Jesus would be handed over to you; and you killed him by letting sinful men crucify him.* GNT

Rom 8:32a *God didn't spare his own Son but handed him over to death for all of us.* GW

In accordance, Jesus suffered and died willingly

John 10:11, 17–18a [Jesus:] I am the good shepherd. *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* … [17]This is why the Father loves me – because *I lay down my life*, so that I may take it back again. [18]*No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of my own free will.* NET

d) Jesus Christ's Resurrection and Ascension

God raised Jesus from the dead, by his power

Acts 2:24 But *God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death*, because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. NET

1Cor 6:14 *By his power God has raised the Lord from the dead* and will also raise us from the dead. NCV™

Jesus' body was not found in his tomb

Luke 24:22–24 [An early believer:] Furthermore, some women of our group amazed us. *They were at the tomb early this morning,* [23]*and* when *they did not find his body*, they came back and said they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. [24]*Then some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said*, but they did not see him. NET

Jesus was raised in a bodily form

Luke 24:39–40 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Look at my hands and my feet; it's me! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones like you see I have."* [40]*When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* NET

Jesus appeared to people after his resurrection

Acts 1:3 *To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God.* NET

Acts 2:32 [Peter, to a crowd of largely Jews:] *This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it.* NET

Jesus was taken up to God in heaven

Acts 1:9–11 After he [Jesus] had said this, while they were watching, *he was lifted up and a cloud hid him from their sight.* [10]As *they were still staring into the sky while he was going*, suddenly two men in white clothing stood near them [11]and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? *This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven.*" NET

Because he had willingly suffered death, God exalted and glorified Jesus Christ

Phil 2:8–11 *He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross!* [9]*As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,* [10]so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth –[11]and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. NET

Heb 2:9b *We see him now crowned with glory and honor because of the death he suffered.* GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 13

Salvation through Jesus Christ

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I. Salvation from Sin

The teachings in this section are at the absolute heart of the NT and the gospel message. It is critical for anyone trying to comprehend the Christian faith to soundly understand them.

a) Jesus Christ's Death as an Offering for Sin

God provided Jesus Christ as an offering for sin

Rom 8:3b By *sending his Son to be an offering to pay for sin*, God used a human life to destroy sin. NCV™

Jesus Christ died for our sins . . .

1Cor 15:3b *Christ died for our sins*, as the [OT] Scriptures say. CEV

. . . He gave himself as an offering to God, as a sacrifice for our sins

Eph 5:2 Live a life of love just as *Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God*. NCV™

Heb 7:27b *Jesus brought the sacrifice for the sins of the people once and for all when he sacrificed himself.* GW

Jesus Christ is the "Lamb" who was sacrificed

1Cor 5:7b For *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*. NET

References to Jesus as a "Lamb" allude to him being an offering or sacrifice. Possibly the title alludes to the imagery of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah 53:7, which in turn may well be based on the use of a lamb in some sin offerings (e.g. Lev 4:32; 5:6). Alternatively, the Passover lamb (cf. 1Cor 5:7b ; Mark 14:12), which was integral to the Israelite's redemption from Egypt, may primarily be in view. Thus references to Jesus as a "Lamb" speak of him as a sin offering and/or as an offering to pay for redemption. Both meanings are very relevant.

Jesus Christ was an unblemished offering – being without sin

Heb 9:14 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] ... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit *offered himself without blemish to God*, purify our consciences from dead works to worship the living God. NET

2Cor 5:21a *Christ was without sin* ... GNT

In his death, Jesus Christ bore our sins

1Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree*, that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. NET

In his death Jesus Christ effectively took our sins from us and bore them and their consequences himself. Note that having no sin of his own (as discussed in the previous subsection) was critical to Jesus Christ being eligible to bear the sins of others.

b) Jesus Christ's Death and Atonement for Sin

Biblical atonement is where God in his grace accepts an offering or sacrifice of a living being (i.e. its life) as a substitute for the life of a sinner – the person's life otherwise being required for their sin. As such, God accepts the sacrifice as payment for the person's sin. The result is that sin is taken away – and so the sinner is forgiven, pronounced righteous and reconciled to God. In conjunction with this, God's wrath – provoked by sin – is appeased.

In the OT, people who had sinned brought an animal as an offering of a life, for the priests to sacrifice on their behalf to make atonement for them. Jesus Christ's offering or sacrifice of himself has a number of striking parallels with this OT practice. Furthermore, his death in fact fulfilled this requirement of the OT law once and for all, making such offerings no longer necessary. The atonement made by Jesus Christ's death is central to the Christian faith.

Jesus Christ died for us

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. NET

Gal 2:20b [Paul:] So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of *the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*. NET

> Jesus Christ died for us, in place of us, as a substitute for our lives. As such, in giving himself as an offering to God for our sin, he gave his life so that we would not have to forfeit our own lives eternally for our sin and suffer eternal "death". Instead we can have eternal life, life which extends beyond physical death. Note that because he is the Son of God, Jesus Christ's life is worth infinitely more than our lives, and so his death was an adequate sacrifice for any number of people.

Jesus Christ's sacrifice of himself for us means that our sins can be forgiven . . .

Matt 26:28 [Jesus:] For *this is my blood of the new covenant that is being poured out for many people for the forgiveness of sins*. ISV

Heb 9:26b–28a But now, at the end of the ages, *he has appeared once for all to remove sin by his sacrifice*. [27]Indeed, just as people are appointed to die once and after that to be judged, [28]so *the Messiah was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people*. ISV

. . . and that we can therefore be justified and righteous before God

Rom 5:9, 19 [Paul, to believers:] Now that *we have been justified by his blood*, how much more will we be saved from wrath through him! ... [19]For just as through one man's disobedience many people were made sinners, so also *through one man's obedience many people will be made righteous*. ISV

> Note that "one man's obedience" (v. 19) clearly has in view Jesus Christ's sacrifice, which was made by him in obedience to God.

So through Jesus Christ's death we can be reconciled to God . . .

Col 1:21–22 [Paul, to believers:] You used to be far from God. Your thoughts made you his enemies, and you did evil things. [22]But *his Son became a human and died. So God made peace with you, and now he lets you stand in his presence as people who are holy and faultless and innocent*. CEV

. . . and through Jesus Christ we can have peace with God

Rom 5:1 [Paul, to believers:] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. ESV

Thus, Jesus Christ was the atoning sacrifice for sins, saving people from God's wrath

1Jn 2:2 *It is he who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world's*. ISV

1Thes 5:9 [Paul, to believers:] *For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*. NET

c) Jesus Christ's Death and Redemption from Sin

> In the OT, references to God redeeming his people generally speak of God saving them or setting them free from oppression. In the NT, references to redemption more specifically involve the concept of setting people free by the payment of a ransom, a payment of comparable value. This reflected the use in NT times of "redeem" to denote the freeing of a slave by a payment. The NT applies such terms to Jesus Christ redeeming or freeing believers from enslavement to sin by giving his life as a ransom.

Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for us, to redeem us from sin

1Tim 2:5–6 For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, *Christ Jesus, himself human, [6]who gave himself as a ransom for all*, revealing God's purpose at his appointed time. NET

Eph 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*, according to the riches of his grace, ... NET

God's people have been bought by Jesus Christ's death . . .

Rev 5:9 They [heavenly beings] were singing a new song: "You [Christ] are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were killed, and *at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation*. NET

An implication of believers being redeemed from sin by Jesus Christ's death is that they have been bought for God – to whom they are now slaves (as per the following subsection).

. . . They have been freed from sin and are now slaves to God

Rom 6:22 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now that *you have been freed from sin and have become God's slaves*, the benefit you reap is sanctification, and the result is eternal life. ISV

Jesus Christ's death sets us free from sin's control . . .

Titus 2:14 *He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness* and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good. NET

Rom 6:6–7 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] We know that *our old natures were crucified with him so that our sin-laden bodies might be rendered powerless and we might no longer be slaves to sin. [7]For the person who has died has been freed from sin.* ISV

This speaks of believers being freed from sin through Jesus Christ's death in terms of our union with him, in which we participate in his death in a spiritual sense and consequently die to sin. In v. 6, "sin-laden bodies" is a figurative term referring to our sin-laden selves – the "sinful self" (GNT, cf. NCV). Its power over us has been broken, meaning that we are no longer enslaved to sin.

. . . and Jesus Christ's death cleanses us from sin

1Jn 1:7 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and *the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*. NET

Sin defiles us and makes us spiritually unclean – separating us from God who is holy, set apart from sin and such uncleanness. In conjunction with redeeming us and freeing us from sin, Jesus Christ's death cleanses us from sin's defilement and the associated spiritually uncleanness. This allows us to be brought into a relationship with God (as reflected in the following two subsections).

Note that in the above verse, the word translated "cleanses" has a continuous tense, implying ongoing purification rather than a single act of purification (cf. *New Bible Commentary*). Although Jesus Christ's sacrifice is the only sacrifice needed, the cleansing from sin that it provides needs to be claimed time and again.

Note: Jesus Christ's death redeems people from the law . . .

Gal 4:4–5 But when the appropriate time had come, *God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5]to redeem those who were under the law*, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights. NET

One important aspect of the redemption provided by Jesus Christ, is that we have been redeemed from bondage to the Mosaic Law – which is the sense here of "to redeem those who were under the law" (cf. CEV, NLT). As such, we are freed from the law's regulations and rituals.

. . . and Jesus Christ's death redeems people from the law's consequences

Gal 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (because it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree") …* NET

The law imposes on us a curse as a consequence for sinning and breaking the law. But Jesus Christ redeemed us from this curse as he removed it from us and took it upon himself – "put himself under that curse" (NCV) – by dying for us, in our place.

d) Jesus Christ's Resurrection and Salvation

Jesus Christ's resurrection has a key part in people being saved

1Pet 3:21 [PETER, SPEAKING TO BELIEVERS AND MAKING REFERENCE TO BAPTISM:] It is not the washing away of bodily dirt, but the promise made to God from a good conscience. *It saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, …* GNT

By what baptism symbolizes (as opposed to the act of baptism) we are saved by Jesus Christ's resurrection – the culmination of his saving work.

Jesus Christ's resurrection is linked to the forgiveness of sins . . .

Acts 5:30–31 [Peter and the other apostles, to Jewish leaders:] *The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus*, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree. [31]*God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.* NET

> Without being resurrected Jesus could not have subsequently been exalted as Savior (and Leader), which is here implied as being integral to God's people being given repentance and forgiveness.

. . . and Jesus Christ's resurrection is linked to justification

Rom 4:25 He was handed over to death because of our sins and *was raised to life because of our justification*. ISV

> This points to God showing his acceptance of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for sin by raising him to life. As such, God's resurrection of Jesus Christ validated or affirmed Christ's sacrifice as being acceptable for the sin of humankind. And so it means we can be justified.

Jesus Christ's resurrection was essential for our resurrection

1Cor 15:17–23 [Paul, to believers:] And *if Christ has not been raised*, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins. [18]Furthermore, *those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished.* [19]For if only in this life we have hope in Christ, we should be pitied more than anyone. [20]*But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* [21]*For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man.* [22]*For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.* [23]*But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then when Christ comes, those who belong to him.* NET

> The "firstfruits" (vv. 20, 23) alludes to the firstfruits of the harvest which were offered to God. As well as preceding the rest of the harvest, they were seen as a confirmation that the rest would take place. Here the term is applied to Christ, as like the firstfruits of the harvest, his resurrection precedes and is an assurance of the resurrection of all believers.

Jesus Christ's death and resurrection were a triumph over Satan and evil

Col 2:15 *God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.* NCV™

1Jn 3:8b *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.* ESV

> This largely has Jesus' death and resurrection in view as that by which he destroyed the devil's work of seeking to bring destruction on humankind.

Note: Jesus Christ's resurrection affirmed that he was the Messiah, the Son of God

Rom 1:3–4 It [the gospel] is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; [4]as to his divine holiness, *he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death*. GNT

Acts 2:30–33 [Peter, speaking of a prophecy of David:] Therefore, *since he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him with an oath to put one of his descendants on his throne,* [31]*he looked ahead and spoke about the resurrection of the Messiah: 'He was not abandoned to Hades, and his flesh did not experience decay.'* [32]*It was this very Jesus whom God raised, and of that we are all witnesses.* [33]*He has been exalted to the right hand of God*, has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured out what you are seeing and hearing. ISV

> In vv. 30–31, Peter asserts that David had spoken (cf. vv. 35–38) of the Christ being resurrected to assume the Davidic throne, as the descendant whom God had promised David would be placed on his throne. In vv. 32–33, Peter implies that God's resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent exaltation of Jesus to his right hand (pointing to Jesus' enthronement) shows him to be the one – the Christ.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Salvation for the World

Prior to Jesus Christ's mission, God dealt primarily with Israel, as his people. What Jesus Christ accomplished had momentous implications for all people – notably in making God's salvation, with eternal life, freely available to every person in the world. An associated outcome is that people from all nations can readily become one of God's own people.

a) The Savior of the World

God provides salvation through Jesus Christ

John 3:17 For *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* ESV

1Thes 5:9 *God did not choose us to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* GNT

Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world . . .

1Jn 4:14 [JOHN:] And we have seen and testify that *the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.* NET

. . . Jesus Christ realizes salvation and redemption

Heb 5:9 After he had finished his work, *he became the source of eternal salvation* for everyone who obeys him. GW

Col 1:13–14 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He [God] delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of *the Son he loves,* [14]*in whom we have redemption,* the forgiveness of sins. NET

We can only be saved through Jesus Christ

Acts 4:12 *Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us.* GNT

John 14:6 *Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* NET

The first statement is understood by some commentators to mean that: Jesus is the way to the Father because he is the truth and the life. The second statement emphatically states that he is the only way to God, one implication of which is that Jesus is the only source of salvation.

Jesus Christ will bring believers' salvation to completion on his return

Heb 9:28b And *he will come a second time, not to offer himself for sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.* NCV™

b) Life through Jesus Christ

The "life" spoken of in the NT that Jesus Christ provides is often referred to as spiritual life. It involves being "alive to God" (Rom 6:11), with God's Holy Spirit indwelling us, renewing and nourishing us. With this, we have a spiritual consciousness that enables us to live in communion with and in dependence on God, eternally. This spiritual life is only attainable through Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished.

God provides life through Jesus Christ

1Jn 4:9b *God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him.* NET

Jesus Christ gives spiritual life

John 10:10 [JESUS:] The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. *I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.* GNT

John 6:35 *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.* NET

Jesus speaks of himself as the source of spiritual life. The phrases "never go hungry" and "never be thirsty" indicate he satisfies one's spiritual needs, supplying what is needed for spiritual life.

Jesus Christ gives eternal life

John 17:2 You [God] gave the Son power over all people so *that the Son could give eternal life to all those you gave him.* NCV™

Eternal life encompasses the spiritual life that Christians experience now, as well as its developed form of the afterlife.

Through Jesus Christ we can have eternal life as opposed to death

John 3:16, 36 For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that *everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life*. … [36]*The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him.* NET

John 11:25–26 Jesus said to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even if he dies,* [26]*and the one who lives and believes in me will never die.* Do you believe this?" NET

Jesus is the one through whom resurrection and life come (v. 25a). Those who believe in him will live even though they die physically (v. 25b). At a spiritual level they will never die (v. 26a), but will live eternally.

Jesus Christ saves people from the power of death

1Cor 15:54–57 Now when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will happen, *"Death has been swallowed up in victory."* [55]*"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"* [56]*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* [57]But thanks be to *God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!* NET

Through Jesus Christ believers are given victory over death (vv. 54–55, 57). The "sting" of death – its "power to hurt" (GNT) – comes from sin; sin's potency in turn comes from the consequent condemnation of the sinner by the law (v. 56). So with the law no longer being what determines a believer's righteousness – because of what Jesus Christ accomplished – death no longer has a "sting" for believers.

c) Salvation for the Gentiles through Jesus Christ

The term "Jew" basically refers to the descendants of the people of the former Israelite kingdom of Judah. In NT times these people largely lived in the southern part of the land of Israel. The term "Gentiles" refers to non-Jewish people.

In OT times it was firstly only the Israelites, then after the Babylonian captivity more specifically the Jews, who were "God's people" and as such knew of God's salvation. But through Jesus Christ's mission, God has made salvation open to the Gentiles.

God has extended his salvation to the Gentiles

Acts 28:28 [Paul, to Jewish leaders in Rome:] "Therefore be advised that *this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles*; they will listen!" NET

God has provided salvation for the Gentiles through Jesus Christ . . .

1Cor 1:21b–23 Instead, *God chose to save only those who believe the foolish message we preach*. [22]Jews ask for miracles, and Greeks want something that sounds wise. [23]But *we preach that Christ was nailed to a cross*. Most Jews have problems with this, and most Gentiles think it is foolish. CEV

God saves people through belief in the message about Jesus Christ and his death, even if it seems foolish to some.

. . . Jesus Christ died for all people

Heb 2:9a But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, so *that through God's grace he should die for everyone*. GNT

Salvation is now open to everyone who will accept it by repentance and faith (cf. *I. Getting Right with God*, p. 226).

God has made the way of faith in Jesus Christ open to Gentiles as well as Jews – there is no difference

Rom 3:22, 30 *God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all*: … [30]*God is one, and he will put the Jews*

right with himself on the basis of their faith, and will put the Gentiles right through their faith. GNT

God has given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as well as to Jews

Acts 10:44–45 *While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message.* [45]*The Jewish believers who had come from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also.* GNT

d) The Gentiles as Part of God's People

Gentiles have been accepted by God as being of his people

Acts 10:34–35 Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that *God does not show favoritism in dealing with people,* [35]*but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him.* NET

Rom 9:24–25 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Whether Jews or Gentiles, we are those chosen ones,* [25]*just as the Lord says in the book of Hosea, "Although they are not my people, I will make them my people. I will treat with love those nations that have never been loved.* CEV

In v. 25 Paul quotes from Hosea to show that from among the Gentiles who formerly were not God's people, would now be those who God would call his people (cf. 1Pet 2:10).

Jesus Christ has made Jews and Gentiles one

John 11:51b–52 *Jesus was going to die for the Jewish people,* [52]*and not only for them, but also to bring together into one body all the scattered people of God.* GNT

By dying for all people, Jesus has enabled both Jews and Gentiles to become part of the one people of God.

Gentiles have been included in the true "Israel"

Gal 6:15–16 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that matters is a new creation! [16]And all who will behave in accordance with this rule, peace and mercy be on them, and on *the Israel of God.* NET

The term "Israel of God" (v. 16) refers to those who are "a new creation" (v. 15b). It stands in contrast with circumcision (v. 15a), the sign of the old covenant with Israel as God's people. As such the term alludes to a new "Israel" – "the new people of God" (NLT), "God's true people" (CEV). This new people of God is composed not just of believing Israelites or Jews, but believing Gentiles as well.

Those who have faith are the true, spiritual children of Abraham . . .

Gal 3:6–7 The Scriptures say the same thing about Abraham: *"Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham's faith,* and that faith made him right with God." [7]*So you should know that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith.* NCV™

. . . and God's promise to Abraham is for all who have faith

Rom 4:16 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Therefore, *the promise is based on faith, so that it may be a matter of grace and may be guaranteed for all his* [Abraham's] *descendants—not only for those who were given the law, but also for those who share Abraham's faith, who is the father of us all.* ISV

This speaks of the promise or blessing of righteousness by faith, being given not only to believing Jews but to all who have faith.

e) Epilogue: Jesus Christ's Mission and Israel

Jesus Christ came foremost to Israel . . .

Matt 10:5–6 *Jesus sent out these twelve, instructing them as follows: "Do not go to Gentile regions and do not enter any Samaritan town.* [6]*Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* NET

Jesus' directions to his disciples reflect the priority of the people of Israel, the Jews, in his own mission.

. . . and the gospel of Christ was first preached to the Jews

Acts 11:19 Now those [believers] who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, *speaking the message to no one but Jews*. NET

But the Jews largely rejected Jesus Christ . . .

John 1:11 He came to what was his own, but *his own people did not receive him*. NET

Note that although the first occurrence of "own" is sometimes taken to refer to the world (cf. v. 10), the second at least is more often understood to be referring to Jesus' own people, the Jews.

. . . and many Jews strongly opposed the spreading of the gospel

Acts 17:13 But *when the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul had also proclaimed the word of God in Berea, they came there too, inciting and disturbing the crowds*. NET

The Jews' negative response to Jesus Christ brought God's judgment

Luke 19:41–44 As *Jesus came near Jerusalem, he saw the city and cried for it, [42]saying, "I wish you knew today what would bring you peace. But now it is hidden from you. [43]The time is coming when your enemies will build a wall around you and will hold you in on all sides. [44]They will destroy you and all your people, and not one stone will be left on another. All this will happen because you did not recognize the time when God came to save you."* NCV™

Jesus wept with heartfelt compassion because the people of Jerusalem had not recognized God's coming to them in himself (v. 44b) and the peace that could have come through him (v. 42). Consequently they would face destruction (vv. 43–44) – which came by the Romans in A.D. 70.

God largely rejected the Jews and accepted the Gentiles, due to the Jews rejecting Christ and the gospel . . .

Rom 11:11b, 15 But *by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous*. … [15]For if *their rejection is the reconciliation of the world*, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? NET

In v. 11, their "transgression" (a term akin to "sin") refers to the Jews' (or Israel's) rejection of the gospel, God's way of righteousness that is by faith in Christ.

. . . The Jews' negative response contrasted with the responsiveness of the Gentiles

Acts 13:45–48 But *when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and they began to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him.* [46]Both Paul and Barnabas replied courageously, *"It was necessary to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles.* [47]*For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have appointed you to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"* [48]*When the Gentiles heard this, they began to rejoice and praise the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed for eternal life believed*. NET

But God has left a faithful remnant of Israel

Rom 11:5 So in the same way *at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace*. NET

God did not totally reject Israel, for he has chosen a remnant from among them.

Despite Israel's current state – which has benefited the Gentiles – Israel will be saved

Rom 11:25–26 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: *A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.* [26]*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob*. NET

In keeping with the context, the clause “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26) quite probably refers to Israel as a whole, rather than every individual Israelite or Jew.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 14

The New Order

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I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role

See also:

- *c) God's Covenant with Israel and the Law*, p. 82
- *a) Offerings for Atonement for Sinners*, p. 92
- *c) The Role of the Priests*, p. 94

The law was given to Israel through Moses – hence the term the "Mosaic Law". It was what God's covenant with Israel was based upon. (The contents of this law – including its provisions for dealing with sin – are discussed in the sections cross-referenced above.)

In order to be righteous before God, the Israelites had to continually follow this law, keeping all of its commands – something which they proved incapable of doing. But through Jesus Christ's life and death, God has provided a new way of righteousness, for all people – leading to salvation. As a result of this, the role of the law has been profoundly changed.

a) Righteousness Not by Law, but Faith in Jesus Christ

The Mosaic Law cannot bring perfection . . .

Heb 7:19a *The law of Moses could not make anything perfect.* NCV™

. . . The law only exacerbates the problem of sin

Rom 7:7–8 [Paul:] What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." [8]*But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.* ESV

The law actually stimulates sin, arousing sinful passions (cf. v. 5) and all kinds of desires (v. 8). In fact if it were not for the law, sin would be "a dead thing" (v. 8, GNT) – immaterial.

1Cor 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and *the power of sin is the law.* NET

God's law gives sin its power. For it is the law that makes sin transgression against God, i.e. violation of standards he has set. As such it gives sin the power to bring about condemnation (of sinners) and so bring death.

People are not justified by obeying the law – but by faith in Jesus Christ . . .

Gal 2:15–16 [Paul, to Peter and other Jews:] We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; [16]yet *we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.* ESV

God's way now for us to be made righteous before him is through having faith in Jesus Christ. This primarily involves believing Jesus Christ to be (with what he has accomplished) the means of righteousness – and accordingly trusting in him for one's own righteousness.

In conjunction with this, faith in Jesus Christ encompasses believing what the Bible says about: who he is; his death and resurrection; and the outcomes of his mission. Faith or belief in Jesus Christ is discussed in *Belief in Jesus Christ (I): General*, p. 227; and *Belief in Jesus Christ (III): Outcomes*, p. 229.

. . . Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ – not by the law

Rom 3:21–22a But *now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—* [22]*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* ESV

By faith Abraham was declared righteous – and so will all who emulate him

Rom 4:19–24 *He* [Abraham] *did not weaken in faith when he thought about his own body (which was already as good as dead now that he was about a hundred years old) or about Sarah's inability to have children,* [20]*nor did he doubt God's promise out of a lack of faith. Instead, he became strong in faith and gave glory to God,* [21]*being absolutely convinced that God would do what he had promised.* [22]*This is why "it was*

credited to him as righteousness." [23]*Now the words "it was credited to him" were written not only for him* [24]*but also for us. Our faith will be regarded in the same way, if we believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.* ISV

One's righteous standing is no reason to boast, as it is not due to what one does – but to faith

Rom 3:27–28 *Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith!* [28]*For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law.* NET

b) Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ

Note that below (as per the previous section) "works" refers to things one does to attempt to work for or earn righteousness and salvation. This includes good deeds but mainly has in view actions specifically aimed at fulfilling the law's demands.

God chooses people by his grace, through Jesus Christ – not because of works

Eph 1:3–6 [Paul, to believers:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4]even as *he chose us in him* [Christ] *before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love* [5]*he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,* [6]*to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved* [Christ]. ESV

Rom 11:5–6 So in the same way *at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.* [6]*And if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.* NET

God leads people to respond to him by his grace

Acts 18:27b On his arrival he [Apollos] greatly helped *those who through grace had believed.* ISV

People are justified and made righteous by God's grace, through Jesus Christ – not by law

Rom 3:24 But *they* [people] *are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* NET

Gal 2:21 [Paul:] *I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!* NET

Righteousness comes by God's grace – by what Jesus Christ's death accomplished – not through abiding by the law.

People are saved by God's grace, through Jesus Christ . . .

Eph 2:4–5 [Paul, to believers:] But *God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great,* [5]*that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved.* GNT

. . . People are saved by God's grace rather than by works and the law

Eph 2:8–9 For *by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God;* [9]*it is not from works*, so that no one can boast. NET

Acts 15:10–11 [Peter, to those advocating submission to the law:] So now why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples *a yoke* [the law] *that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?* [11]*On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are.* NET

Eternal life is a gift from God, through Jesus Christ

Rom 6:23 For the payoff of sin is death, but *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* NET

c) Release from the Law through Jesus Christ

See also:

- *a) God's New Covenant*, p. 150

This section looks at how Jesus Christ has fully realized the key objectives of the Mosaic Law, and how as a result God's people have been released from the law.

The most notable implication of this release is that God's people have been freed from bondage to the law as the means of obtaining righteousness and being made holy. Additionally, other major aspects of the law are no longer applicable to God's people. There is also a change of focus in their lives, with them living their lives primarily by faith and in step with the Holy Spirit (cf. *Living Free of the Law and Sin – by the Spirit*, p. 234) – rather than being preoccupied with the requirements of the law.

Note that the law's commands that are applicable to the believer's new spiritual relationship with God or to their relationships with other people, are still very much relevant in that they give guidance in how to please God (cf. *The Relevance of the Law*, p. 149).

Jesus Christ fully realized what the law had worked towards

Heb 10:1, 10–14 For *the law possesses a shadow of the good things to come but not the reality itself, and is therefore completely unable, by the same sacrifices offered continually, year after year, to perfect those who come to worship. ...* [10]By his will *we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* [11]And *every priest stands day after day serving and offering the same sacrifices again and again – sacrifices that can never take away sins.* [12]*But when this priest had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right hand of God,* [13]where he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. [14]*For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are made holy.* NET

The Mosaic Law had primarily worked toward the removal of sin and making God's people holy. But its work really only foreshadowed "the reality" (v. 1) that would be realized through Jesus Christ. For the law's sacrifices for sin were not sufficient to comprehensively deal with sin and make people perfect (vv. 1, 11). But with the sacrifice of himself, Jesus Christ fulfilled what the law with its sin offerings in effect pointed towards, by consummately removing sins (v. 12) and making God's people holy (vv. 10, 14).

So through Jesus Christ believers have been released from the law

Rom 10:4 For *Christ is the end of the law*, with the result that there is righteousness *for everyone who believes.* NET

Gal 3:24–25 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Thus *the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith.* [25]*But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.* NET

The law was only ever to be the authority over God's people until Jesus Christ came, when faith would supersede it as the way for God's people to be righteous.

With Jesus Christ's once and for all sacrifice, there is no longer any need to sacrifice for sin

Heb 10:12, 17–18 *Christ, however, offered one sacrifice for sins, an offering that is effective for ever,* and then he sat down at the right-hand side of God. ... [17]And then *he* [God] *says, "I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer."* [18]*So when these have been forgiven, an offering to take away sins is no longer needed.* GNT

The regulations and rituals of the law are no longer applicable

Col 2:16–17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Therefore *do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days –*[17]*these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ!* NET

The various aspects of the old covenant mentioned (v. 16) merely foreshadowed what was to come with Christ (v. 17). So there is now no longer any binding requirement to observe such regulations – in accordance with what God has done through Christ (v. 14).

Instead of being under the law, believers are under grace

Rom 6:14 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For sin will have no mastery over you, because *you are not under law but under grace.* NET

Believers are not under the law but "under grace". By grace righteousness and salvation are not only gained, as discussed earlier, but are also maintained. For in his grace God enables believers to live godly lives and continues to provide for forgiveness when they do sin. Accordingly, believers

are to rely on God's grace both in striving to please God and for forgiveness.

d) The Relevance of the Law

The spiritual and moral commands of the law are largely in view this section. These commands are those pertaining to the believer's spiritual relationship with God and their relationships with other people.

The law is not nullified . . .

Rom 3:31 *Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! Instead we uphold the law.* NET

In saying that by faith "we uphold the law", Paul is probably meaning that the way of faith validates the law. As such, Paul is probably speaking of either: faith showing the law to play a key role in God's plan of salvation, such as in regard to awareness of sin; or faith providing the way of fulfilling the law's demands (cf. NCV, NLT) thus showing the law's demands to be legitimate.

. . . The law is still good

1Tim 1:8 We know that *the Law is good, if it is used in the right way.* CEV

Note that the subsequent verses (vv. 9–11) speak of the law's use for governing and condemning the ungodly. The following subsections speak further of how to use the law properly.

The primary purpose of the law is to make people aware of sin

Rom 3:20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for *through the law comes the knowledge of sin.* NET

Rom 7:7 [Paul:] Shall we say, then, that the Law itself is sinful? Of course not! But *it was the Law that made me know what sin is. If the Law had not said, "Do not desire what belongs to someone else," I would not have known such a desire.* GNT

The spiritual and moral commands of the law are still to be obeyed

Matt 5:18–19 [Jesus:] I tell you the truth, *until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass* [away] *from the law until everything takes place.* [19]*So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* NET

Most likely Jesus had the moral commands of the law primarily in view, with a number of them being the subject of his subsequent teaching (cf. vv. 21–48).

The law's principles – such as love, justice and mercy – are of central importance, above its rules

Matt 22:35–40 And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: [36]*"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"* [37]*Jesus said to him, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* [38]*This is the first and greatest commandment.* [39]*The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* [40]*All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."* NET

Matt 23:23 [Jesus:] *Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You give a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you neglect what is more important in the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness!* You should have done these things without neglecting the others. NET

The Pharisees had gone to extreme measures in their tithing, which was one aspect of the law, but had overlooked basic principles of the law.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Key Elements of the New Order

Through Jesus Christ's mission God enhanced his relationship with his people and the world. Two defining aspects of this new order are God's new covenant with his own people and the kingdom of God.

As well as having instituted these two things in his mission, Jesus Christ continues to play a key role in both of them. Jesus Christ's role as high priest is arguably the central aspect of God's new covenant with his people. Jesus Christ's reign as Lord of all things involves reigning over the kingdom of God. Additionally, his reign extends to reigning over all things that are as yet to be subjugated to God's kingdom, which awaits consumption.

a) God's New Covenant

See also:

- *c) God's Covenant with Israel and the Law*, p. 82

For a discussion of the term "covenant", see the introductory comment on *II. Key Old Testament Covenants*, p. 81. Note that in addition to a number of the following subsections, the superiority of God's new covenant with his people to that of the old covenant (or first covenant) which God made with Israel is further illustrated in the following section – *Jesus Christ as High Priest*, p. 151. It discusses the advantages of Jesus Christ's priesthood of the new covenant over the priesthood of the old covenant.

The first covenant (with its priesthood and law) was inadequate and superseded by the superior new covenant – through Jesus Christ . . .

Heb 8:6–7, 13 But *now Jesus has obtained a superior ministry* [to the priests' ministry], *since the covenant that he mediates is also better* [than the first covenant] *and is enacted on better promises.* [7]*For if that first covenant had been faultless, no one would have looked for a second one.* … [13]*When he* [God] *speaks of a new covenant, he makes the first obsolete. Now what is growing obsolete and aging is about to disappear.* NET

The covenant which God made with Israel proved inadequate as Israel could not keep the covenant (by obeying its law) and consequently could not be righteous before God. But God has abolished the old covenant and introduced a superior new covenant – mediated by Jesus Christ in his mission.

. . . Components of the first covenant were merely a shadow of what was to come in the new covenant

Heb 10:1 For *the law possesses a shadow of the good things to come but not the reality itself*, and is therefore completely unable, by the same sacrifices offered continually, year after year, to perfect those who come to worship. NET

Jesus Christ's blood ratified the new covenant

Luke 22:20 And in the same way he [Jesus] took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*. NET

At the "last supper" Jesus used a cup of wine to symbolize his blood that would be shed (cf. Matt 26:28). The shedding of Jesus Christ's blood in his death made it possible for people's sins to be forgiven and so opened the way for the new relationship/covenant between God and his people. As the new covenant is made possible and instituted through Christ's death, the shedding of his blood in effect ratified the new covenant – just as the sprinkling of "the blood of the covenant" by Moses ceremonially confirmed the old covenant (cf. Ex 24:6–8).

The new covenant is everlasting

Heb 13:20 Now may the God of peace who by the blood of *the eternal covenant* brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, … NET

The new covenant is spiritual: It is of the Holy Spirit; . . .

2Cor 3:5–6 [PAUL:] Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, [6]who has made us competent to be ministers of *a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit*. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ESV

The "letter" denotes the law. One partakes of the new covenant not through obeying the law but through being transformed by and living by the Holy Spirit.

. . . and it is internal

Jer 31:33a "But *I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land," says the* LORD. *"I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds.* NET

Under the new covenant God's laws have become internal principles, not just commands from an external source. Bear in mind that the reference to "Israel" (cf. Heb 8:10 ⇩) is applicable to the new people of God, inclusive of Gentiles.

Under the new covenant God's people know him and are forgiven

Heb 8:10–12 "For *this is the covenant that I will establish with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord.* I will put my laws in their minds and I will inscribe them on their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be my people. [11]And *there will be no need at all for each one to teach his countryman or each one to teach his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,' since they will all know me, from the least to the greatest.* [12]*"For I will be merciful toward their evil deeds, and their sins I will remember no longer."* NET

This is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Jer 31:33a ⇧). Verses 11–12 show that under God's new covenant, all God's people know him and their sins are truly forgiven. Note that v. 10b speaks of the new covenant also fulfilling a primary aim of the old covenant – "I will be their God and they will be my people" (cf. Jer 24:7).

b) Jesus Christ as High Priest

See also:

- *d) Epilogue: God's People Relate to God through Jesus Christ*, p. 175

In the replacement of God's old covenant with Israel by God's new covenant with all who are now his people, the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant has been replaced by Jesus Christ's superior priesthood of the new covenant.

Jesus Christ is the high priest of God's people – representing them before God in the superior heavenly sanctuary

Heb 8:1b–2 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *We have such a high priest, one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,* [2]*a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up.* NET

Heb 9:24 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] For *the Messiah did not go into a sanctuary made by human hands and just a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in God's presence on our behalf.* ISV

The term "sanctuary" refers to the place of God's presence. This was signified in Israel by the tabernacle and then later the temple, in particular by the Most Holy Place within them. In actuality God of course primarily dwells in heaven, and it is in this sanctuary that Jesus Christ ministers as high priest.

Jesus Christ was appointed by God as high priest forever, in the superior priestly order of Melchizedek

Heb 7:17 For *here is the testimony about him: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."* NET

Genesis 14:18–20 tells of Abraham meeting with Melchizedek, who was king of Salem (which would become Jerusalem). It refers to Melchizedek as "priest of God Most High", indicating he was a priest and worshipper of the LORD. Hebrews 7:1–10 shows Melchizedek's spiritual superiority to both Abraham and the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant that came from Abraham, the priests being Abraham's descendents. One aspect of this is that because no account is given of Melchizedek's ancestry, birth or death, he is understood to have an everlasting priesthood.

Previous sacrifices offered by priests were ultimately ineffective in dealing with sin . . .

Heb 10:11 And *every priest stands day after day serving and offering the same sacrifices again and again — sacrifices that can never take away sins.* NET

. . . As high priest, Jesus Christ sacrificed for sin once and for all

Heb 10:12–14 But when *this priest had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time*, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13]where he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. [14]*For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are made holy.* NET

As high priest, Jesus Christ continues to intercede for God's people

Heb 7:25 So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because *he always lives to intercede for them.* NET

1Jn 2:1 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I am writing this to you, my children, so that you will not sin; but *if anyone does sin, we have someone who pleads with the Father on our behalf—Jesus Christ*, the righteous one. GNT

In his ongoing priestly ministry for God's people, Jesus Christ continues to intercede before God for them, speaking to God on their behalf.

Jesus Christ is a high priest who is perfect – but can still identify with his people's humanity

Heb 7:26 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] For *it is indeed fitting for us to have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners*, and exalted above the heavens. NET

Heb 4:15–16 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] For *we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin.* [16]*Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help.* NET

Jesus Christ is a high priest who is himself perfect (cf. Heb 7:26 ▯; 4:15b ▯). As such Jesus Christ was able to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice and is able to remain always in God's presence to represent his people. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is also a high priest who can identify with his people's humanity (cf. 4:15 ▯). As such, being perfect yet empathetic, Jesus Christ is a high priest who will meet his people's needs (cf. 4:16 ▯).

c) The Kingdom of God

NT teaching on the kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven) follows on from OT teaching on God's reign or kingship (cf. *God Reigns Supreme*, p. 64). It indicates that Jesus Christ's coming inaugurated a more far-reaching, spiritual dimension of God's reign. Its domain is in the hearts and minds of those who submit to God. This kingdom of God also has both a present and future dimension – existing now, but only being fully consummated at the end of the age. Then God's authority will be fully imposed in all spheres of existence – once and for all.

The kingdom of God came in Jesus Christ's mission

Matt 12:28 [JESUS:] But *when I force out demons by the power of God's Spirit, it proves that God's kingdom has already come to you.* CEV

Mark 1:14–15 Now after John was imprisoned, Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. [15]*He said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near.* Repent and believe the gospel!" NET

With Jesus' mission, the time had come for the kingdom of God to "come near" (NRSV).

The kingdom of God will come in all its fullness in the future

Luke 21:31 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] So also you, *when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.* NET

The phrase "these things" refers to signs of the end of the age.

The spiritual nature of the kingdom of God

Luke 17:20b–21 [JESUS:] *"The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen.* [21]*No one will say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!'; because the Kingdom of God is within you."* GNT

The final clause of v. 21 probably means that God's kingdom is within the hearts of its people (cf. CEV text note), indicative of its spiritual nature.

The dynamism and power of the kingdom of God

Mark 4:26–29 He [Jesus] also said, *"The kingdom of God is like someone who spreads seed on the ground. [27]He goes to sleep and gets up, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. [28]By itself the soil produces a crop, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.* [29]And when the grain is ripe, he sends in the sickle because the harvest has come." NET

> The growth of God's kingdom is not dependent on human effort (v. 28a) and is in fact beyond human comprehension (v. 27b). This illustrates its dynamism and power.

1Cor 4:20 For *the kingdom of God is demonstrated not in idle talk but with power.* NET

> God's kingdom "consists of and is based on" (AMP) spiritual power – not talk.

The great cost of participating in the kingdom of God

Matt 13:44–46 *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid.* Then because of joy *he went and sold all that he had and bought that field. [45]"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. [46]When he found a pearl of great value, he went out and sold everything he had and bought it.* NET

> Although some commentators have a somewhat different understanding, both these parables seem to be essentially illustrating the absolute cost of the kingdom of God; one must be prepared to forgo everything for it. Note the joy in doing so that is apparent in v. 44.

Those who will enter the kingdom of God

Matt 7:21 [JESUS:] *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.* NET

Matt 18:1–4 At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" [2]He called a child, had him stand among them, [3]and said, *"I tell you the truth, unless you turn around and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven! [4]Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* NET

> Similarly in Mark 10:15 Jesus says, "…whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." These verses refer to the humility, trust and receptiveness of little children, characteristics which are required to believe Jesus' message and enter God's kingdom.

Note: The kingdom of God is also the kingdom of Jesus Christ

Eph 5:5 For you can be confident of this one thing: that no person who is immoral, impure, or greedy (such a person is an idolater) has any inheritance in *the kingdom of Christ and God*. NET

> As shown in the following section, *Jesus Christ as Lord of All*, God has granted authority over all things to Jesus Christ. This includes authority over his kingdom (cf. Luke 22:29). Thus the kingdom can be referred to as being of God and also as being of Jesus Christ.

d) Jesus Christ as Lord of All

> God has made Jesus Christ Lord of all things, to rule over all creation on God's behalf.
>
> The NT speaks of Jesus Christ's lordship as being initiated or affirmed, in him being pronounced Lord of all upon his post-resurrection exaltation to God's right hand. However, note that some verses suggest that in some sense at least he was Lord of all things prior to this, speaking of his prior power or authority over all things.

Following his resurrection, God exalted Jesus Christ to his right hand . . .

Eph 1:20 This power he exercised in Christ when *he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms …* NET

> In seating Jesus Christ at his right hand, God exalted Jesus Christ in honor and authority above every other being.

. . . and God made Jesus Christ Lord of all

Acts 10:36 You know the message he [God] sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the Good News of peace through *Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all*. GNT

Phil 2:9–11 As a result [of Jesus being obedient and dying] *God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,* [10]*so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth –* [11]*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.* NET

> Verses 10–11 speak of all people in the future acknowledging Jesus Christ's status, which itself is a current reality.

God has given Jesus Christ authority and power over all things

Matt 28:18 Then Jesus came up and said to them [his disciples], *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* NET

Phil 3:20b–21 *Our Lord Jesus Christ* [21]*has power over everything,* and he will make these poor bodies of ours like his own glorious body. CEV

God has entrusted everything to Jesus Christ – and made him heir of all things

John 3:35 *The Father loves the Son and has put everything in his hands.* ISV

Heb 1:1–2 [The writer, to Jewish believers:] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2]but in these last days he has spoken to us by *his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things*, through whom also he created the world. ESV

Jesus Christ has power over all other powers

Col 2:10 [Paul, to believers:] And you have been brought to fullness in *him* [Christ], *who is the head of every ruler and authority.* ISV

Jesus Christ's power extends over death

Rev 1:18 [Jesus:] I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! *And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead.* NCV™

> As the holder of the keys of death and the place of the dead, Jesus Christ has total authority over their domain – including authority over who goes in and out of them, and when.

In the end, all Jesus Christ's enemies will be made his footstool – totally conquered

Heb 10:12–13 But when this priest [Christ] had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13]where *he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet.* NET

CHAPTER 15

‘The Last Things’

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I. Jesus Christ’s Return and the Judgment

The history of the world as we know it will culminate in Jesus Christ’s dramatic and awesome return. Associated with this is God’s final judgment of all people, through Jesus Christ, in which the eternal destiny of each person will be pronounced.

Note that *The Antichrist and the Final Persecution*, p. 433, also deals with events of the end times – in its case, events that precede Jesus Christ’s second coming. As such it is a further aspect of the biblical teachings that are often referred to as “The Last Things”.

a) Prologue: Judgments Preceding Jesus Christ’s Return

The passages in this section are largely extracts from visions that the apostle John received. Bear in mind that they are from Revelation, chapters 6–18, which contain apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is prophetic and largely symbolic. It mostly speaks of events of the end times. Many of these events involve great destruction, but show God’s emphatic control and justice. As such apocalyptic literature provides great encouragement to God’s people of all eras.

Commentators differ on a number of aspects of the three series of seven judgments. Such points of difference include: to what extent each of the judgments are symbolic or literal; the timing of the judgments; and whether the three sets describe the same events.

Extracts from the first series of judgments: The seven seals

Rev 6:3–4, 7–8 [John:] Then when the Lamb [Christ] opened *the second seal*, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come!” 4And another horse, fiery red, came out, and *the one who rode it was granted permission to take peace from the earth, so that people would butcher one another, and he was given a huge sword*. … 7Then when the Lamb opened *the fourth seal* I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come!” 8So I looked and here came a pale green horse! *The name of the one who rode it was Death, and Hades followed right behind. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill its population with the sword, famine, and disease, and by the wild animals of the earth.* NET

Quite possibly the seven seals represent events leading up to the end of the age, although it is open to conjecture as to whether these take place just prior to the end or over a longer period. The latter two sets of judgments (see below) certainly appear to be among the events of the end of the age, with the bowl judgments – the most severe – taking place immediately prior to Jesus Christ’s return.

Extracts from the second series of judgments: The seven trumpets

Rev 8:7, 12 *The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was thrown at the earth so that a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. …* 12*Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. And there was no light for a third of the day and for a third of the night likewise.* NET

Rev 9:15 The voice said to *the sixth angel who had the trumpet*, “Free the four angels who are tied at the great river Euphrates.” 15*And they let loose the four angels who had been kept ready for this hour and day and month and year so they could kill a third of all people on the earth.* NCV™

Extracts from the third series of judgments: The seven bowls

Rev 16:2–3, 8 So *the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth. Then ugly and painful sores appeared on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.* 3*Next, the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea and it turned into blood, like that of a corpse, and every living creature that was in the sea died. …* 8*Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was permitted to scorch people with fire.* NET

Rev 16:17–18, 20–21 *Finally the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air* and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying: “It is done!” 18*Then there were flashes of lightning, roaring, and crashes of thunder, and*

there was a tremendous earthquake – an earthquake unequaled since humanity has been on the earth, so tremendous was that earthquake. … [20]*Every island fled away and no mountains could be found.* [21]*And gigantic hailstones, weighing about a hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people,* but they blasphemed God because of the plague of hail, since it was so horrendous. NET

b) The Timing of Jesus Christ's Return

God has set a time for Jesus Christ's return

Matt 24:36–37 *No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows.* [37]*When the Son of Man comes,* it will be like what happened during Noah's time. NCV™

> In v. 36, "that day" most likely refers to the day of Jesus Christ's return – "the coming of the Son of Man" (v. 37). The verse indicates that God has set a time for it.

Jesus Christ's return will be at an unexpected time, while people are living as usual

1Thes 5:1–3 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. [2]For you yourselves are fully aware that *the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* [3]*While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman,* and they will not escape. ESV

Matt 24:38–39 *In those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage right up to the day when Noah went into the ark.* [39]*They were unaware of what was happening until the flood came and swept all of them away. That's how it will be when the Son of Man comes.* ISV

Jesus Christ's return will be preceded by distressful events

Luke 21:9–11 And *when you hear of wars and rebellions, do not be afraid. For these things must happen first, but the end will not come at once."* [10]*Then he* [Jesus] *said to them, "Nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.* [11]*There will be great earthquakes, and famines and plagues in various places, and there will be terrifying sights and great signs from heaven.* NET

2Thes 2:1–4 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ* and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, [2]not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. [3]Let no one deceive you in any way. *For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.* [4]*He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.* NET

> This "man of lawlessness" (v. 3) appears to be a final antichrist, probably the first beast of Revelation 13. Presumably he will be the prime instigator of this momentous "rebellion" (v. 3) against God.

Awesome cosmic events will occur just prior to Jesus Christ's return

Matt 24:29–30a Immediately after the suffering of those days, *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.* [30]*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven,* and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. NET

> Note that these cosmic events may be the ones referred to in Luke 21:11 in the previous subsection.

Jesus Christ's return is spoken of as being imminent

James 5:8–9 [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] You, too, must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because *the coming of the Lord is near.* [9]Do not complain about each other, brothers, or you will be condemned. Look! *The Judge is standing at the door!* ISV

Obviously when the NT was written Jesus Christ’s return was not near in terms of our perception of time. One explanation of this is that as “a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day” (2 Peter 3:8, NET), Christ’s return can be spoken of in a sense as “near” from any point in time. Another view is that the writers are asserting the certainty of Christ’s return rather than its nearness in time.

c) Jesus Christ’s Return

Jesus Christ will return with his angels

2Thes 1:7b He will do this *when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven with his mighty angels, …* GNT

Jude 1:14b *Look! The Lord has come with countless thousands of his holy ones.* ISV

Jesus Christ will come in great glory

Luke 21:27 Then *they* [people] *will see the Son of Man arriving in a cloud with power and great glory.* NET

Believers who have died will be resurrected and all of them will be gathered to him

1Thes 4:16–17 [Paul, to believers:] For *the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* [17]*Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.* NET

Matt 24:31 The great trumpet will sound, and *he* [Christ] *will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other.* GNT

On Jesus Christ’s return his followers will be rewarded

1Pet 5:4 [Peter, to believers:] Then *when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away.* NET

On Jesus Christ’s return evil powers will be crushed

1Cor 15:23–25 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then *when Christ comes,* those who belong to him. [24]*Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power.* [25]*For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* NET

d) The Final Judgment (I): Its Scope and Outcomes

See also:

- *II. The Afterlife*, p. 162

  As reflected by the above cross reference, the outcomes of the final judgment are further discussed in the second half of this chapter.

God will judge every person, for all they have done

Rom 14:10b For *we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.* NET

Eccl 11:9b But *remember that God will judge you for everything you do.* NCV™

The dead will rise . . .

Acts 24:15 [Paul:] I have a hope in God (a hope that these men themselves accept too) that *there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.* NET

. . . They will rise to be judged, and either rewarded with eternal life or be condemned

Dan 12:2 *Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground will awake – some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence.* NET

Eternal life will be the reward for godliness

Matt 25:46 And these [unrighteous] will depart into eternal punishment, but *the righteous into eternal life.* NET

Rom 6:22 [Paul, to believers:] But now that *you have been freed from sin and have become God's slaves, the benefit you reap is sanctification, and the result is eternal life*. ISV

God's wrath and destruction will be the recompense for ungodliness

Rom 2:8 ... but *for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury*. ESV

2Thes 1:8–9a *Then he will punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the Good News about our Lord Jesus Christ.* [9]*Those people will be punished with a destruction that continues forever.* NCV™

e) The Final Judgment (II): The Process

As this section shows, there will be two prominent factors in the final judgment: people's deeds; and people's response to Jesus Christ (i.e. whether one has believed in or has rejected Jesus Christ). This has led many theologians to conclude that people's eternal destiny (i.e. heaven or hell) will be determined by their response to Jesus Christ, with their deeds then determining the degree of their reward or punishment.

However bear in mind that there is a correlation between godly deeds and belief in Jesus Christ, and likewise between ungodly deeds and rejection of Jesus Christ (cf. *Those who have rejected Jesus Christ – not obeying and doing evil – will be condemned*, below). As such, there may be a strong correlation between judgment on the basis of one's deeds and judgment on the basis of one's response to Jesus Christ.

God has appointed Jesus Christ judge and will judge all people through him

Acts 10:42 He [Christ] commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that *he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead*. NET

Rom 2:16b [Paul:] *God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus*. NET

On his return, Jesus Christ will judge and reward all people according to what they have done

Matt 16:27 For *the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done*. NET

Rev 20:12–13 [John, describing a vision of the final judgment:] And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and another book was opened – the book of life. So *the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to their deeds*. [13]The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and *each one was judged according to his deeds*. NET

Those who have believed in Jesus Christ will be saved and have eternal life

Acts 16:30b–31 [A jailer, to Paul and Silas:] "Sirs, *what must I do to be saved?"* [31]*They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved*, you and your household." NET

John 20:31 But these [miracles of Jesus] are recorded so *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*. NET

Those who have rejected Jesus Christ – persisting in doing evil – will be condemned

John 3:18–21, 36 The one who believes in him is not condemned. *The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.* [19]*Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.* [20]*For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed.* [21]But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God. ... [36]The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. *The one who rejects the Son will not see life*, but *God's wrath remains on him.* NET

The basis of God's judgment – "the basis for judging" (v. 19a) – is people's acceptance or rejection of the "light" that came in Jesus Christ and his teaching. One's acceptance or rejection of the "light" is reflected in one's deeds (vv. 19–21).

What people have known will be taken into account

Rom 2:12 For *all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* NET

Gentiles without knowledge of the Mosaic Law, by nature have a grasp of its requirements (cf. vv. 14–15) and will be judged as such (v. 12a). Those who know the law have a clearer understanding of what God requires, and so they will be judged more strictly (v. 12b).

f) Jesus Christ's Universal Rule

The subject of Jesus Christ's universal rule and a messianic age has different interpretations. One view is that they should primarily be correlated with the present form of God's kingdom, over which Jesus Christ rules as Lord and where people from among the nations have turned to God. Another view is that there will be a period of widespread righteousness at the end of the age prior to the consummation of God's kingdom and the afterlife (as per "The Millennium", see below). A further possibility is that verses speaking of the Messiah's universal rule are portraying the afterlife. (Additionally, some of the passages may have different stages of fulfillment, and so be relevant to more than one of these scenarios.)

Accordingly, it is debatable whether chronologically this section – or particular subsections in it – should be placed: before the earlier sections on Jesus Christ's return; before the above sections on the last judgment; or even in the second half of this chapter.

Prelude: The thousand years

Rev 20:4b–5 *They* [believers who had been martyred] *came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* [5]*(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection.* NET

Revelation 20:1–6 is critical to the significant concept of "The Millennium". Each of verses 2–6 refers to a thousand-year period – a millennium. This millennium is arguably also referred to by numerous OT passages (cf. *II. God's Plans for Israel*, p. 215) and possibly a few other NT ones.

Probably the two most popular interpretations today of this "Millennium" are the Amillennialist and Premillennialist viewpoints. Amillennialists view the reign of deceased believers with Christ (cf. Rev 20:4b) to refer to a present reign in heaven. They see this reign as having been introduced by Jesus Christ's first coming, with him being pronounced Lord of all. They believe that Jesus Christ will return, and then the general resurrection will occur, followed by the final judgment. Following this would be the reign of Jesus Christ over the new earth in the afterlife.

Premillennialists believe that Christ's return will be followed by a first resurrection of believers, who will reign with Christ in a literal thousand-year rule of righteousness on earth. This would then be followed by the final resurrection and then the final judgment.

God will establish the Messiah as ruler over all

Ps 72:8, 11 *His kingdom will reach from sea to sea, from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.* … [11]*All kings will bow down before him; all nations will serve him.* GNT

The Messiah will have a universal reign of righteousness and peace

Isa 11:4–5 *He will treat the poor fairly, and make right decisions for the downtrodden of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and order the wicked to be executed.* [5]*Justice will be like a belt around his waist, integrity will be like a belt around his hips.* NET

Mic 4:3 *He will arbitrate between many peoples and settle disputes between many distant nations. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not use weapons against other nations, and they will no longer train for war.* NET

"He" (v. 3) refers to the LORD (cf. v. 1), but many understand this prophecy as being fulfilled through the Messiah.

All nations will turn to God

Zec 8:20–21 The LORD who rules over all says, *'It will someday come to pass that people – residents of many cities – will come.* [21]*The inhabitants of one will go to another and say, "Let's go up at once to ask the favor of the LORD, to seek the LORD who rules over all. Indeed, I'll go with you."'* NET

As with the verses in the adjacent subsections, this appears to have in view the time of the Messiah's universal reign of righteousness.

All nations will worship God

Ps 86:9 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *All the nations, whom you created, will come and worship you, O Lord. They will honor your name.* NET

All people will acknowledge and submit to Jesus Christ

Phil 2:9–11 As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, [10]so that *at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth –*[11]*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* to the glory of God the Father. NET

As the Messiah, all people will bow in submission and acknowledge Jesus Christ's identity and authority.

God's people will reign with Jesus Christ

2Tim 2:12 *If we endure, we will also reign with him.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. The Afterlife

The believer’s hope is largely based on God’s wonderful promises for his people concerning the afterlife, the life begun by their resurrection from death. At the center of these promises is the final, everlasting phase of God’s relationship with his people. In contrast to these wonderful promises are the teachings about the horrific eternity that the ungodly face.

a) The New Creation

The present heavens and earth will pass away . . .

Matt 24:35 [Jesus:] *Heaven and earth will pass away*, but my words will never pass away. NET

. . . The devastation of the heavens and earth in association with God’s judgment of the wicked

2Pet 3:7, 10–12 [Peter, to believers:] Now by the same word *the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire and are being kept for the day when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed*. … [10]But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. *On that day the heavens will disappear with a roaring sound, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be exposed.* [11]*Since everything will be destroyed in this way*, think of the kind of holy and godly people you ought to be [12]as you look forward to and hasten the coming of the day of God, by which *the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire*. ISV

God will create new heavens and a new earth

2Pet 3:13 [Peter, to believers:] But, according to his [God’s] promise, *we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides*. NET

Commentators differ on whether Scripture speaks of the creation of an entirely different heaven and earth, or a renewal of the old heaven and earth. The former seems the more likely, with the previous subsections seemingly supporting this view. However the verses in the following subsection could be interpreted to support the latter. In either case, this new creation will be free of any corruption – moral or otherwise – and will exist in harmony with God.

God will renew all things

Matt 19:28 Jesus said to them [his disciples], “I tell you the truth: In *the age when all things are renewed*, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. NET

Rom 8:20–21 For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly but because of God who subjected it – in hope [21]that *the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children*. NET

The “glorious freedom” (v. 21) would appear to encompass freedom from decay and anything harmful.

God’s people will live in the new Jerusalem

Rev 21:2, 27 [John, describing a vision:] And *I saw the holy city – the new Jerusalem – descending out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband*. … [27] …but *nothing ritually unclean will ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or practices falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.* NET

Note that a number of other verses in the remainder of this chapter are also from Revelation 21–22 (cf. Rev 21:10–11, 23–26 ⇩), in which John describes a vision of the new Jerusalem.

Note: The new Jerusalem is linked with the renewed Jerusalem prophesied in the OT

Rev 21:23–26 [John, describing a vision:] And *the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light*, and its lamp is the Lamb. [24]*By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,* [25]*and its gates will never be shut by day*—and there will be no night there. [26]*They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.* ESV

This speaks of the new Jerusalem. The following passage from Isaiah speaks of the future renewed

Jerusalem prophesied in the OT. The striking parallels here – and in a number of other references – suggest a correlation between the two cities. See also the introductory comment on *II. God's Plans for Israel*, p. 215.

Isa 60:3, 11, 19 And *nations shall come to your* [Jerusalem] *light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ...* [11]*Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. ...* [19]*The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the* LORD *will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.* ESV

b) Eternal Life

As God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, God will also raise his people

1Cor 6:14 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *God indeed raised the Lord and he will raise us by his power.* NET

On Jesus Christ's return, their bodies will be made imperishable, glorious and spiritual – like Christ

1Cor 15:42–44, 49–52 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] It is the same *with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown* [one's natural body] *is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.* [43]*It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;* [44]*it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ...* [49]*And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust* [Adam], *let us also bear the image of the man of heaven* [Christ]. [50]*Now this is what I am saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* [51]Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but *we will all be changed –*[52]*in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* NET

Note that the "last trumpet" (v. 52) is one which will sound to announce Christ's return.

God's people will be given eternal life

Jude 1:21 [JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] Keep yourselves in God's love as you *wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever.* NCV™

Eternal life transcends physical death and precludes eternal spiritual death . . .

John 11:25–26 Jesus said to her [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. *The one who believes in me will live even if he dies,* [26]*and the one who lives and believes in me will never die.* Do you believe this?" NET

In v. 25 "dies" refers to physical death, whereas in v. 26 "never die" speaks of never being subject to eternal spiritual death – i.e. destruction in hell.

. . . There will be no more death for God's people

Luke 20:36 *Nor can they die anymore, because they are like the angels* and, since they share in the resurrection, are God's children. ISV

1Cor 15:26, 53–55 *The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ...* [53]*For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* [54]*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."* [55]*"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* ESV

God's people will have the right to the tree of life and the water of life

Rev 22:14, 17b *Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can have access to the tree of life* and can enter into the city by the gates. ... [17] ... And let the one who is thirsty come; *let the one who wants it take the water of life free of charge.* NET

Being given access to "the tree of life" (cf. Gen 2:9; 3:22) and being able to drink from "the water of life" signify being given eternal life.

God's people will have accompanying eternal blessings

1Pet 1:3–4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4]to *an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading*, kept in heaven for you, … ESV

c) The Heavenly State of God's People

God's people will enter the kingdom of God . . .

Acts 14:22b Paul and Barnabas told them [believers], "We must suffer a lot *to enter the kingdom of God*." GW

. . . and they will inherit the kingdom

Matt 25:34 Then the king [Christ] will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you* from the foundation of the world. NET

Believers will inherit the kingdom of God. As such they will participate in it (as reflected in the previous subsection) in a fuller sense than they do now, and it will be their domain.

God's people will be in heaven . . .

John 14:2–3 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you.* [3]*After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am.* NCV™

In v. 2, "my Father's house" is a reference to heaven. As mentioned earlier, God's people will dwell in the new Jerusalem. Although this is spoken of as "coming down out of heaven" (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10) it also appears to be closely connected with heaven, perhaps in some sense a manifestation of it. For the verses in this and the following subsection appear to suggest that in the afterlife God's people will be in heaven.

. . . Heaven is where their reward is kept

Matt 5:12a [JESUS, TO THOSE WHO WOULD FOLLOW HIM:] Rejoice and be glad because *you have a great reward in heaven!* GW

Matt 6:20 But *accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. NET

God's people will be made perfect

Phil 3:12 [PAUL:] Not that I have already attained this – that is, *I have not already been perfected* – but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. NET

Paul implies that believers will be made perfect.

God's people will have glory

1Pet 5:1b, 4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] I make this appeal as a spiritual leader who also witnessed Christ's sufferings and *will share in the glory that will be revealed*. … … [4]Then, when the chief shepherd appears, *you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*. GW

God's people will have great joy . . .

Jude 1:24 [JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] Now to him [God] who is able to keep you from stumbling and *to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy*, … ESV

. . . There will be no more sorrow

Rev 21:4 *He* [God] *will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more – or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist.* NET

Note: The salvation and redemption of God's people will be fully realized

1Pet 1:5 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Through faith you are being protected by God's power for *a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time*. ISV

Luke 21:28 But when these things begin to happen [signs of the end of the age], stand up and raise your heads, because *your redemption is drawing near*. NET

In accordance with the teachings in the subsections above and in the previous section – *Eternal Life* – the above verses (1Pet 1:5; Luke 21:28) indicate that the salvation and redemption of God's people will come to fulfillment in the afterlife, at the end of this age. The following section – *Being with God* – further reflects on what will be involved.

d) Being with God

God will dwell with his people

Rev 21:3 [John, describing a vision:] And I heard a loud voice from the throne [of God], saying, "*Now God's presence is with people, and he will live with them*, and they will be his people. *God himself will be with them* and will be their God. NCV™

> Note that this speaks of the ultimate fulfillment of one of the key aspects or aims of God's relationship with his people throughout history – that they be his people and he be their God.

God's people will see God

Rev 22:4 *They will see his face*, and his name will be written on their foreheads. NCV™

God's people will be with Jesus Christ

1Thes 4:17b [Paul, to believers:] And so *we will always be with the Lord*. NET

God's people will have God's and Jesus Christ's names written on them

Rev 3:12 [Jesus Christ:] The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never depart from it. *I will write on him the name of my God* and the name of the city of my God (the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from my God), *and my new name as well*. NET

> Having God's and Jesus Christ's names written on them will identify those who conquer or overcome worldly opposition (i.e. faithful believers) as belonging to God and Jesus Christ – forever. As such, it is also indicative of the fact that believers will forever be with God and Jesus Christ.

God's people will share in God's and Jesus Christ's glory

1Thes 2:12 [Paul, to believers:] We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases *God, who calls you to share in his own Kingdom and glory*. GNT

Rom 8:17 [Paul, to believers:] Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for *if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory*. GNT

God's people will praise God . . .

Rev 19:5–7 [John, describing a vision:] Then a voice came from the throne, saying: *"Praise our God all you his servants, and all you who fear Him, both the small and the great!"* [6]*Then I heard what sounded like the voice of a vast throng, like the roar of many waters and like loud crashes of thunder. They were shouting: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All–Powerful, reigns!* [7]*Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory*, because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. NET

> Presumably such praise of God will continue throughout eternity.

. . . and God's people will serve God

Rev 7:15 [John, speaking of believers in heaven:] For this reason *they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple*, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. NET

e) The Punishment for the Ungodly

The ungodly face God's wrath . . .

Rom 2:5 [Paul, addressing self-righteous readers:] But *because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed!* NET

. . . The ungodly face destruction

Phil 3:18–19 [Paul, to believers:] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19]*Their end is destruction*, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ESV

The ungodly will be separated from God and Jesus Christ – shut out from the holy city

Matt 7:21, 23 [Jesus:] *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven*. … [23]Then I will declare to them [ones who do not do God’s will], ‘I never knew you. *Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’* NET

Rev 22:14–15 Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can have access to the tree of life and can enter into the city [the new Jerusalem] by the gates. [15]*Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood!* NET

The ungodly will be thrown into fire

Rev 20:14–15 [John, describing a vision:] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. *This is the second death – the lake of fire.* [15]*If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, that person was thrown into the lake of fire.* NET

There will be darkness and torment

Matt 22:13 Then the king said to his attendants, ‘Tie him up hand and foot and *throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’* NET

> The punishment given to the man in this parable is indicative of hell.

The punishment is eternal

Matt 25:46 And *these* [unrighteous people] *will depart into eternal punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life. NET

Note: There will be varying degrees of punishment

Matt 11:23–24 [Jesus:] And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to Hades! For if the miracles done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. [24]But I tell you, *it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you!* NET

Mark 12:40 They [teachers of the law] devour widows’ property, and as a show make long prayers. *These men will receive a more severe punishment.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

Unit D

God and His Own People

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CHAPTER 16

The Standing of God’s People

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I. Basics

This chapter looks at the standing or position of God's people in relationship to God. Probably the most basic aspect of this is that they belong to God, as his people. As such the relationship between believers and God is both a strong one and a close one. This is underlined by them being his family and also his church.

a) Prologue: God Draws People to Himself

See also:

- *b) Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ*, p. 147

This section contains some teaching which contrasts with teaching elsewhere in the Bible – and has been the subject of much debate. It teaches that God chooses (or elects) some people to be his, and so to be saved. Yet the Bible also teaches that God desires and provides for the salvation of all people (cf. *G*, p. 226; ., p. 226) and that all people have the choice of whether to respond to him or not.

In coming to terms with this "tension" in Scripture, one should bear in mind that as the Bible teaches both "sides", the truth lies in both of them, as opposed to a position that is a compromise of both.

God chooses people (to be his people) . . .

Mark 13:20 [Jesus:] If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would be saved. But for the sake of *the elect whom he has chosen*, he has shortened those days. ISV

Luke 18:7a Won't God give justice to *his chosen ones*, who cry out to him day and night? NET

God's people are in view in the above verses as "the elect whom he has chosen" (Mark 13:20) and "his chosen ones" (Luke 18:7a).

. . . God chooses people to receive spiritual blessings

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! *Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom* that he promised to those who love him? NET

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this [that God had extended his salvation to Gentiles], they began to rejoice and praise the word of the Lord, and *all who had been appointed for eternal life* believed. NET

The use of "appointed" speaks of God choosing people for eternal life.

God calls them to himself

Acts 2:39 [Peter, telling a crowd of the promise of the Holy Spirit:] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, *everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself*. ESV

This verse supports the assertion that those who are God's people have been called to be by God.

God enables people to believe and turn to Jesus Christ

John 6:44 [Jesus:] *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*, and I will raise him up at the last day. NET

Acts 11:20–23 But among them [believers] were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began talking to the Hellenistic Jews too, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. 21*The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord.* 22When the church in Jerusalem heard this news, they sent Barnabas all the way to Antioch. 23When he arrived, *he rejoiced to see what the grace of God had done*, and with a hearty determination he continuously encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord. ISV

The people's belief and turning to the Lord (v. 21b) is attributed to neither how the message was presented nor the people's own initiative, but to the "hand of the Lord" (v. 21a) – evidencing "the grace of God" (v. 23).

Note: God's mercy and people's destiny

Rom 9:10–18 [Paul:] Not only that, but when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our ancestor Isaac — 11*even before they were born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling) — 12it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger,"* 13*just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* 14What shall we say then? Is there injustice with God?

Absolutely not! [15]For he says to Moses: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* [16]*So then, it does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.* [17]*For the scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."* [18]*So then, God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy, and he hardens whom he chooses to harden.* NET

The basic thrust of this passage is that God has mercy on who he wants or chooses to – which he has the right to do. Thus God's purpose for people and their destiny – in this life (vv. 11–12, 17) and the next (cf. vv. 22–23) – depends on God's mercy. In illustrating this in the case of Jacob and Esau, "hated" (v. 13) is used in a relative sense (cf. AMP, CEV), to emphasize God's choice of Jacob over Esau.

b) God's People Belong to God

God's people belong to him

1Pet 2:9a [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] However, you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *people who belong to God*. GW

They are God's people . . .

Col 3:12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God loves you and has chosen you as *his own special people*. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. CEV

Isa 63:8a *He* [God] *said, "Certainly they will be my people,* children who are not disloyal." NET

. . . and God is their God

2Chr 13:10a [ABIJAH, KING OF JUDAH:] But *as for us, the LORD is our God* and we have not rejected him. NET

God's people are called by God's name

Deut 28:10 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Then *all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD,* and they shall be afraid of you. NKJV

Being called by God's name identifies God's people as his, showing their unique relationship with him and is reflective of them being part of his family (as per the following section, *God's People Are His Family*). Note that references to being called (i.e. named or identified) by God's name may simply be speaking of being called "God's" (or "the LORD's"; cf. Isa 44:5) or "God's people".

God's people belong to Jesus Christ . . .

Rom 14:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So *whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*. GNT

. . . God gives his people to Jesus Christ

John 10:29 [JESUS, REFERRING TO HIS FOLLOWERS:] *My Father, who has given them to me,* is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. NET

c) God's People Are His Family

Each believer belongs to the household of God

Eph 2:19 [PAUL, TO NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS:] So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but *you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, ...* NET

As members of God's household, God's people are in effect his family (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT) – as the following subsections reflect.

God is their Father

Rom 1:7 To all those loved by God in Rome, called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ! NET

They are God's children

John 1:12–13 But to all who have received him [Jesus Christ] – those who believe in his name – *he has given the right to become God's children* [13]*– children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God*. NET

Those who accept Jesus and believe in him (v. 12a) are enabled to become God's children (v. 12b) – born of God (v. 13) into spiritual life.

As God's children, they are also heirs of God

Rom 8:17 [Paul, to believers:] *And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ)* – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him. NET

God's people are Jesus Christ's brothers and sisters

Matt 12:49–50 And pointing toward his disciples *he* [Jesus] *said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!* 50*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."* NET

God's people are also brothers and sisters of each other

Matt 23:8 [Jesus, to his followers:] But you must not be called 'Teacher,' because you have only one Teacher, and *you are all brothers and sisters together*. NCV™

d) God's People Are His Church

The term "church" denotes an assembly or body of believers that belong to God. Additionally it can be used more generally of God's people as a whole – the worldwide church.

God's people form God's church

Acts 20:28 [Paul, to the Ephesian church leaders:] Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. NET

Jesus Christ is the church's Lord and ruler

John 13:13–14 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and do so correctly, for that is what I am.* 14If *I then, your Lord* and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another's feet. NET

Heb 3:6a But *Christ is faithful as a son over God's house*. NET

This speaks of Jesus Christ being "in charge" (CEV, GNT, NLT) of God's house or church – i.e. its ruler.

The church is God's temple, in which God dwells by his Holy Spirit . . .

1Cor 3:16 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] Do you not know that *you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you*? NET

Eph 2:21–22 He [Jesus Christ] is the one who holds the whole building together and *makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord.* 22*In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit*. GNT

In v. 21 the universal church appears to be in view. This may also be the case in v. 22, although there Paul may be turning the focus to the Ephesian church in particular. Bear in mind that the assertion in the above subheading is applicable to the universal church and also to individual churches, with each church's members together forming a spiritual building.

. . . As such, God's people meet together in his presence

Acts 10:33 [Cornelius, to Peter:] Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So *now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us*. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ

Arguably the most fundamental change in the standing of God’s people in relationship to him that followed what Jesus Christ accomplished, is that they are now “in” Jesus Christ. Being “in” Jesus Christ involves the association or correlation of believers with Jesus Christ, by which God views them in association with his Son.

Due to this connection with Jesus Christ, they participate with him in such things as: his victory over sin and death; his life; and other blessings he has secured. As such it has great significance in the relationship of believers to God.

Note that expressions like “in Jesus Christ” sometimes have other meanings, such as “through Jesus Christ”. While the verses in this section have been interpreted here as using such expressions to speak of believers being “in” Jesus Christ, in some instances the meaning is debatable.

a) God’s People Are ‘in’ Jesus Christ

God’s people are “in” Jesus Christ

Eph 1:1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], *the faithful in Christ Jesus*. NET

They are “in” Jesus Christ because of what God has done

1Cor 1:30 [Paul, to believers:] And *because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*, … ESV

God’s people are “in” Jesus Christ because of what God has accomplished through Christ for his people, such as securing for them “righteousness and sanctification and redemption”.

Jesus Christ identifies himself with God’s people

Matt 25:40 Then the King will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, *anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me*.’ NCV™

The King in this parable represents Jesus Christ himself. Commentators generally interpret “my people” to be referring to Christians.

God’s people live with Jesus Christ . . .

2Cor 13:4 [Paul, to believers:] For indeed he was crucified by reason of weakness, but he lives because of God’s power. For we also are weak in him, but *we will live together with him*, because of God’s power toward you. NET

. . . and Jesus Christ is in them

John 14:20 [Jesus, to his disciples:] You will know at that time that I am in my Father and you are in me and *I am in you*. NET

Eph 3:16–17a [Paul, to believers:] I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, [17]*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*, … NET

b) The Significance of Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ

Generally speaking at least, the spiritual standing and blessings that believers have are based on them being “in” Jesus Christ, by which they are associated and even identified with him. As referred to earlier, this means that they are granted by God the standing and blessings that Jesus Christ has attained on behalf of those so associated with him.

“In” Jesus Christ God’s people are saved

2Tim 2:10 [Paul:] So I endure all things for the sake of those chosen by God, that *they too may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus* and its eternal glory. NET

This may be meaning that salvation comes to those who are “in” or “belong to” (CEV) Jesus Christ – hence its use here. However it could simply be referring to salvation coming through Christ (cf. GNT).

“In” Jesus Christ they are redeemed and have righteousness

Col 1:13–14 [Paul, to believers:] He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of *the Son he loves*, [14]*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*. NET

2Cor 5:21 [Paul, to believers:] God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, *so that in him we would become the righteousness of God*. NET

> "In" Jesus Christ believers share in the righteousness of God (cf. GNT).

"In" Jesus Christ God's people are sanctified

1Cor 1:2 [Paul:] To the church of God that is in Corinth, *to those sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: … ESV

"In" Jesus Christ they are identified with him in his death, resurrection and life

Col 2:11–13 [Paul, to believers:] *In him you also were circumcised* – not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but *by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ.* [12]*Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.* [13]And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, *he* [God] *nevertheless made you alive with him* [Christ], *having forgiven all your transgressions*. NET

> Verses 11–12 speak of one's sinful nature being cut off through one being buried and raised with Christ. Following on from this, Paul speaks of believers being given life with Christ (v. 13).

"In" Jesus Christ God's people are given God's grace

1Cor 1:4–5 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] I always thank my God for you because of *the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus.* [5]*For you were made rich in every way in him, in all your speech and in every kind of knowledge* – … NET

"In" Jesus Christ God's people have spiritual "fruits"

John 16:33 [Jesus, to his disciples:] I have told you these things so that *in me you may have peace*. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world. NET

1Tim 1:14 [Paul:] But the grace of our Lord was fully given to me, and with that grace came *the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*. NCV™

> This appears to be speaking of the faith and love "that are [to be realized] in Christ Jesus" (AMP), "in union with Christ Jesus" (GNT). However it has also been interpreted as referring to this faith and love as coming from or being of Jesus Christ (cf. NIrV, NLT).

"In" Jesus Christ God's people have eternal life

1Jn 5:11b–12 [John, to believers:] *God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* [12]*The one who has the Son has this eternal life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have this eternal life.* NET

> Verse 11 may be speaking of eternal life having its source in Jesus Christ (cf. GNT), rather than being realized through one being "in" him. However v. 12 certainly has the believer's union with Christ in view.

"In" Jesus Christ they will have glory

1Pet 5:10b He [God] called you *to share in his glory in Christ*, a glory that will continue forever. NCV™

c) God's People Are One Body 'in' Jesus Christ

See also:

- *a) The Church as One Body*, p. 284

All believers – including Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free – are one body "in" Jesus Christ . . .

Gal 3:28 [Paul, to believers:] *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* NET

> Oneness in Jesus Christ takes primacy over all distinctions. In him "there is no difference" (GNT, NCV) between contrasting groups such as Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, and males and females. For no group is spiritually superior to another, and all are equal before God (cf. Eph 6:8–9). Note that the use of "Greek", as opposed to "Jew", appears to denote all Gentiles.

. . . The church is in fact the body of Christ

Eph 1:23 Now *the church is his body, the fullness of him* who fills all in all. NET

The description of the church as the “body” of Christ figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people, and points to the oneness that his people have together in their relationship to Christ. Note that the phrase “the fullness of him” (v. 23) has a few possible meanings. It may mean that: the church is filled by Christ’s presence and/or by the blessings he gives it; the fullness of Christ is manifested in the church; or the church is the complement of Christ, in a sense the completion of what he represents.

God’s people are many different parts making up one body “in” Jesus Christ

Rom 12:4–5 [Paul, to believers:] *Each one of us has a body with many parts, and these parts all have different uses.* [5]*In the same way, we are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a part of that body, and each part belongs to all the other parts.* NCV™

The church body is built “in” Jesus Christ . . .

Eph 2:21–22 [Paul, to the Ephesian believers:] *In him the whole building is joined together and rises into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.* [22]*You, too, are being built in him along with the others into a dwelling place of God* in the Spirit. ISV

The “building” is composed of “members of God’s household” (v. 19 ⇩).

. . . and Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the church

Eph 2:20 [Paul, to non-Jewish believers:] You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. *Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.* GW

Jesus Christ is the head of the church body

Col 1:18 *He is the head of the body, the church*, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things. NET

Jesus Christ is portrayed as the husband of the church

2Cor 11:2 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because *I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.* NET

The portrayal of Jesus Christ as the husband of the church points to both his headship of it and his oneness with it (cf. Gen 2:24 et al.).

d) Epilogue: God’s People Relate to God through Jesus Christ

Verses which speak of God’s people relating to God (e.g. praying to him) “through” Jesus Christ appear to have in view one or more of the following three concepts: Jesus Christ’s death opening the way into God’s presence; Jesus Christ’s priesthood; and God’s people being “in” Jesus Christ. All three are aspects of Jesus Christ’s mediatory role in a believer’s relationship with God.

Jesus Christ’s death and priesthood have opened the way into God’s presence for God’s people

Heb 10:19–22 So, brothers and sisters, *we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus’ death.* [20]*We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain —Christ’s body.* [21]*And since we have a great priest over God’s house,* [22]*let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.* NCV™

The reference to Jesus Christ’s body as “the curtain” (v. 20) is drawing a parallel between: his death, which opened a way for believers to confidently enter into God’s presence; and the curtain which the high priest went through to enter the Most Holy Place of God’s presence on the Day of Atonement, in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

God's people have access to God through Jesus Christ – by the Holy Spirit

Eph 2:18 [Paul, to believers:] *It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.* GNT

> Here "through Christ" may be speaking of how people are to approach God. Alternatively it could be referring to being able to approach God because of what Jesus Christ has done (cf. NLT) – i.e. his reconciliation of people to God by his death (cf. v. 16).

God's people give thanks and praise to God through Jesus Christ

Col 3:17 [Paul, to believers:] And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of *the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*. NET

Heb 13:15 [The writer, to believers:] *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. NET

> Jesus Christ's role as high priest is in view here, with him being the one through whom we offer such sacrifices.

God's people ask God for things in Jesus Christ's "name"

John 16:23b, 26 [Jesus, to his disciples:] I tell you the solemn truth, *whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. …* [26]*At that time you will ask in my name*, and I do not say that I will ask the Father on your behalf. NET

> Being "in" Jesus Christ and relating to God "through" Christ (as per the previous couple of subsections) are connected to the concept here of relating to God in Jesus Christ's "name". The latter embodies relating to God under or by the authority of Jesus Christ. It is because of a believer's relationship with Jesus Christ – in which believers may relate to God "through" Christ – that a believer can make requests of God in Jesus Christ's "name", on his authority.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 17

Keys to God’s Interaction

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I. Basics

This section looks at some basic factors underlying God's interaction with his people. They show that God's relationship with his people is not an aloof, impersonal one – far from it. God is always with his people and they can actually know him. Complementary to this is God's great love and steadfast faithfulness towards his people – two characteristics which are often coupled together in the Bible. Undergirding all God's interaction with his people is his truly amazing grace.

a) God Is Always with His People

"The best of all is: God is with us." – John Wesley

God and Jesus Christ are with their people

2Cor 6:16b [Paul, to believers:] We are the temple of the living God, as *God himself says, "I will live with these people and walk among them.* I will be their God, and they will be my people." CEV

2Thes 3:16b [Paul, to believers:] *The Lord be with you all.* NET

This is a blessing or prayer, speaking of Jesus Christ's presence with his people.

God and Jesus Christ are always with their people . . .

Josh 1:5b [God:] *Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.* ESV

Matt 28:20b [Jesus:] And *remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* NET

. . . God's people are always with God – living in his presence

Ps 73:23 [A psalmist, to God:] But *I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.* NET

Ps 41:12 [David, to God:] You defend my integrity, and *you set me in your presence forever.* GW

God is with his people wherever they go . . .

Josh 1:9b Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for *the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.* ESV

. . . God also goes before his people

Deut 31:8 *The Lord himself will go before you.* He will be with you; he will not leave you or forget you. Don't be afraid and don't worry. NCV™

God is with his people in trouble

Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, *an ever-present help in times of trouble.* GW

Being with his people in trouble, God sees them through it

Ps 91:15 [God, speaking of one who loves him:] When he calls out to me, I will answer him. *I will be with him when he is in trouble; I will rescue him* and bring him honor. NET

Isa 43:2 [God:] *When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you pass through the streams, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you.* NET

God in fact lives in his people, and they in him

1Jn 4:13, 15–16 [John, to believers:] *We know that we live in God and he lives in us, because he gave us his Spirit. …* 15*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has God living inside, and that person lives in God.* 16And so we know the love that God has for us, and we trust that love. God is love. *Those who live in love live in God,* and God lives in them. NCV™

Verses that speak of God and/or Jesus Christ living in their people (or vice versa) largely have in view the spiritual union of God and Jesus Christ with their people. This union is in part at least based on God's people having his Holy Spirit (v. 13).

God's people are with Jesus Christ even in death

Phil 1:23–24 [Paul, speaking of life and death:] I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire *to depart and be with Christ*, which is better by far, [24]but it is more vital for your sake that I remain in the body. NET

b) God Knows His People and They Know Him

See also:

- *d) Know God*, p. 264

God and Jesus Christ know their people

Ex 33:17 The Lord said to Moses, "I will do this thing also that you have requested, for you have found favor in my sight, and *I know you by name*." NET

> The expression "I know you by name" (cf. John 10:3b) indicates: intimate knowledge – "I know you very well" (GNT, NCV); and a personal relationship – "I know you personally" (AMP); "you are my friend" (NLT, cf. CEV).

John 10:3b, 14 [Jesus, speaking of himself as "the good shepherd":] *He calls his own sheep by name* and leads them out. … [14]"I am the good shepherd. *I know my own* and my own know me – … NET

God and Jesus Christ know all their people's needs and troubles

Matt 6:8 Do not be like them, for *your Father knows what you need before you ask him*. NET

Rev 2:9 [Jesus Christ, to the church in Ephesus:] *I know the distress you are suffering and your poverty* (but you are rich). *I also know the slander against you* by those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. NET

God enables his people to know him

Eph 1:16b–17 [Paul, to believers:] I always remember you in my prayers, [17]asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, *to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you will know him better*. NCV™

So God's people know him . . .

1Jn 2:14a [John, to believers:] I am writing to you, my children, because *you know the Father*. GNT

1Jn 4:7 [John, to believers:] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and *whoever loves has been born of God and knows God*. ESV

. . . and God's people know Jesus Christ

1Jn 2:13a [John, to believers:] I am writing to you, fathers, that *you have known him who has been from the beginning*. NET

> The expression "him who has been from the beginning" refers to Jesus Christ.

God's people are friends of God and Jesus Christ

James 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Now Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness," and *he was called God's friend*. NET

John 15:14–15 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *You are my friends if you do what I command you*. [15]I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not understand what his master is doing. But *I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father*. NET

God's people have fellowship with God and Jesus Christ

1Jn 1:3 [John, to believers:] What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and *indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ*). NET

c) God Loves His People

See also:

▪ *G*, p. 20

God loves the whole world but his love for believers has an additional intimacy or a more personal facet. There is also far more latitude for God to express his love in his dealings with those who are in a right or true relationship with him.

God loves his people

John 16:27 [Jesus, to his disciples:] For *the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God*. NET

God loves his people greatly

Ps 86:5 [David, to God:] You are good to us and forgiving, *full of constant love for all who pray to you*. GNT

Ps 32:10 Wicked people have many troubles, but *the Lord's love surrounds those who trust him*. NCV™

God's love is with his people always – forever

Ps 89:28 [God, speaking of David:] *My steadfast love I will keep for him forever*, and my covenant will stand firm for him. ESV

The reference to God's "steadfast love" is indicative of the constancy and reliability of God's love. What God says here of his love in regard to David is applicable to each of his people.

God shows his love for his people in delivering them . . .

Ps 86:13 [David, to God:] For *you will extend your great loyal love to me, and will deliver my life from the depths of Sheol*. NET

"Sheol" is a reference to the grave.

. . . and God shows his love for his people in protecting them

Deut 33:12b *"The Lord's loved ones will lie down in safety, because he protects them all day long. The ones he loves rest with him."* NCV™

God shows his love in his kindness and blessings to his people

Num 14:19 [Moses, to God:] *Please forgive the iniquity of this people according to your great loyal love, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now.* NET

1Jn 3:1a [John, to believers:] *See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are.* GNT

Jesus Christ loves God's people – as he showed when he gave his life for them

John 15:9, 12–13 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you*; remain in my love. ... [12]My commandment is this – to love one another just as *I have loved you.* [13]*No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends.* NET

Note: God delights and rejoices in his people

Zeph 3:17 The Lord your God is in your midst; he is a warrior who can deliver. *He takes great delight in you; he renews you by his love; he shouts for joy over you.* NET

d) God Is Faithful to His People

See also:

▪ *c) Faithfulness* [God's], p. 17

God is always faithful to his people

Ps 25:10 *The Lord always proves faithful and reliable to those who follow the demands of his covenant.* NET

God is faithful even if his people are unfaithful and do wrong

Rom 3:3–4a But *what if some of them were not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful?* [4]*Certainly not!* GNT

Neh 9:33 [Levites, to God:] You are righteous in all that is happening to us, because *you have acted faithfully while we have practiced evil*. ISV

God shows his faithfulness in helping his people

Ps 91:4 [A psalmist, to those who trust in God:] He will cover you with his wings; you will be safe in his care; *his faithfulness will protect and defend you*. GNT

Lam 3:22–23 [Jeremiah, referring to his people:] The Lord's gracious love is the reason we are not consumed, since *his compassions never end.* [23]*They are new every morning—great is your faithfulness!* ISV

1Cor 10:13b [Paul, to believers:] *God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.* NET

God faithfully keeps his promises to his people

Josh 21:45 *Not one of the Lord's faithful promises to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; every one was realized.* NET

Ps 119:140 [A psalmist, to God:] *Your promises are proven*, so I, your servant, love them. NCV™

God faithfully maintains his covenants with his people forever

Deut 7:9 [Moses, to the Israelites:] Know that the Lord your God is God, the trusted *God who faithfully keeps his covenant to the thousandth generation of those who love him and obey his commands*. ISV

Ps 89:28 [God, speaking of David:] *I will show my gracious love toward him forever, since my covenant is securely established with him.* ISV

Note: God remembers his people

Isa 49:14–16 The people of Zion said, "The Lord has turned away and forgotten us." [15]*The Lord answered, "Could a mother forget a child who nurses at her breast? Could she fail to love an infant who came from her own body? Even if a mother could forget, I will never forget you.* [16]*A picture of your city is drawn on my hand. You are always in my thoughts!* CEV

e) God Shows Grace to His People

See also:

- *b) Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ*, p. 147

  What God does for his people is based on his "grace" – his free and undeserved favour. God's wonderful grace in the believer's salvation is discussed largely in *Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ*, p. 147. This section primarily deals with the ongoing role of God's grace in his people's lives.

God and Jesus Christ show abundant grace towards their people

2Cor 9:14 [Paul, to the Corinthians:] And in their [needy believers'] prayers on your behalf they long for you because of *the extraordinary grace God has shown to you*. NET

Here Paul speaks of God's grace in moving the Corinthians to generously give towards supporting needy believers.

1Tim 1:14 [Paul:] And *our Lord poured out his abundant grace on me* and gave me the faith and love which are ours in union with Christ Jesus. GNT

By grace God's people are given spiritual blessings and gifts

John 1:16 [John, primarily to believers:] *Out of the fullness of his* [Christ's] *grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another.* GNT

Rom 12:6 [Paul, to believers:] And *we have different gifts according to the grace given to us*. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. NET

The spiritual gifts given to believers are manifestations of God's grace (cf. v. 3).

By grace God's people are entrusted with his work . . .

Eph 3:7–9 [Paul:] *I became a servant of this gospel according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me* by the exercise of his power. [8]To me – less than the least of all the saints – *this*

grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ [9]*and to enlighten everyone about God's secret plan* – a secret that has been hidden for ages in God who has created all things. NET

. . . and by grace they are enabled to do God's work

2Cor 9:8 And *God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times, you will overflow in every good work*. NET

By grace God's people are strengthened

Heb 13:9 [The writer, to believers:] Do not let all kinds of strange teachings lead you from the right way. *It is good to receive inner strength from God's grace*, and not by obeying rules about foods; those who obey these rules have not been helped by them. GNT

2Cor 12:9–10 [Paul, speaking of Christ's response to a request:] But *he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.* [10]*Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.* NET

> Jesus Christ's grace was sufficient for Paul in his weakness. For the more Paul was aware of his weaknesses, the more he was open to depending on Christ's power – in which by grace he was truly made strong.

By grace God's people avoid sin

Heb 4:15–16 [The writer, to believers:] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but *one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* [16]*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* ESV

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God's Holy Spirit in His People

God's incomparable gift of his Holy Spirit is critical to God's relationship with each of his people – including God's work in and through them. In part at least, this is due to the Holy Spirit being the prime means by which God renews and helps believers.

a) God Gives the Holy Spirit to His People

God gives his people his Holy Spirit . . .

Gal 4:6 [Paul, to believers:] *Since you are God's children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts*, and the Spirit cries out, "Father." NCV™

Rom 5:5 [Paul, to believers:] And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through *the Holy Spirit who was given to us*. NET

. . . God gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe and obey him

John 7:38–39a [Jesus:] *The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have rivers of living water flowing from his heart."* [39]*Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who were believing in him were to receive …* ISV

Acts 5:32 [The apostles:] And we are witnesses of these events, and so is *the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him*. NET

The Holy Spirit lives in God's people

2Tim 1:14 [Paul, to Timothy:] Protect that good thing [the truth] entrusted to you, through *the Holy Spirit who lives within us*. NET

Having the Holy Spirit verifies that a person is one of God's people . . .

Rom 8:15–16 [Paul, to believers:] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but *you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father."* [16]*The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children.* NET

The Holy Spirit testifies to and assures believers that they are God's children (v. 16). Accordingly, by the Holy Spirit believers can acknowledge and address God as "Abba" or Father (v. 15).

. . . Having the Holy Spirit indicates that God lives in a person

1Jn 3:24b Now *by this we know that God resides in us: by the Spirit he has given us*. NET

Having the Spirit of God verifies that God himself lives in us.

The Holy Spirit is God's seal, guaranteeing what is to come

Eph 1:13–14 [Paul, to believers:] You, too, have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. *When you believed in him you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,* [14]*who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession*, to his praise and glory. ISV

God's "own possession" refers to believers, who have been marked as such by being given God's Holy Spirit.

b) God Works in His People through the Holy Spirit

God saves his people through the Holy Spirit

2Thes 2:13 [Paul, to believers:] But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because *God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit* and faith in the truth. NET

God instructs and teaches his people through the Holy Spirit

Neh 9:20a [Levites, to God:] *You imparted your good Spirit to instruct them.* NET

1Cor 2:9–10 [Paul, to believers:] But just as it is written, "Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him." [10]*God has revealed these to us by the Spirit.* For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. NET

God works through his people by the Holy Spirit . . .

Zec 4:6b–7 [God, to Zerubbabel who was a leader of the Jews:] 'Not by strength and not by power, *but by my Spirit,' says the Lord who rules over all."* [7]*"What are you, you great mountain? Because of Zerubbabel you will become a level plain! And he will bring forth the temple capstone with shoutings of 'Grace! Grace!' because of this."* NET

> God would accomplish the work he was doing through Zerubbabel by his Spirit. Mountainous problems would be overcome and Zerubbabel would "bring forth the temple capstone" (v. 7b) signifying the completion of the work (the rebuilding of the temple).

. . . God speaks through his people by the Holy Spirit

Neh 9:30a [Levites, to God:] You were patient with them for many years. *You warned them by your Spirit through your prophets.* GW

> God spoke through his prophets by the Holy Spirit, often to admonish the Israelites. Note that speaking through his people by the Holy Spirit is one way in which God works through his people by the Holy Spirit (as per the previous subsection).

Jesus Christ works amongst God's people through the Holy Spirit

2Cor 3:3 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] And you show that *you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,* not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ESV

> The Corinthians' new spiritual lives were composed by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, in Paul's ministry.

The Holy Spirit continues Jesus Christ's work in his people . . .

John 14:26 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But the Advocate, *the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you.* NET

> Jesus said God would send the Holy Spirit in his name – "in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf" (AMP; cf. CEV, NLT). As such the Holy Spirit represents Jesus Christ's interests and continues his work, doing such things as calling believers' attention to Jesus Christ's teachings.

. . . and the Holy Spirit continues Jesus Christ's work through his people

Acts 1:8 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.* NET

> The Holy Spirit empowers believers to witness for Jesus Christ, throughout the world.

c) The Holy Spirit Renews God's People

The Holy Spirit brings spiritual life

See also:

- ., p. 188

John 6:63 [Jesus:] *The Spirit is the one who gives life;* human nature is of no help! *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* NET

> Particularly in light of the verse's first clause, the final statement may indicate that the words Jesus spoke were from (cf. NIrV, CEV) or spoken through the Holy Spirit. As such they are words that the Holy Spirit uses to produce life – when people believe them and live according to them.

The Holy Spirit makes God's people holy

1Pet 1:2a [Peter, to believers:] God the Father decided to choose you as his people, and *his Spirit has made you holy.* CEV

The Holy Spirit gives God's people love and faith

Rom 15:30 [Paul, to believers:] My friends, by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and *by the love that comes from the Holy Spirit,* I beg you to pray sincerely with me and for me. CEV

Acts 11:24 *Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith*, and many people were brought to the Lord. GNT

The description of Barnabas as being full of both the Holy Spirit and faith (cf. Acts 6:5, re Stephen) arguably implies that faith comes with the Holy Spirit. It at least associates faith with having the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives God's people joy and peace

1Thes 1:6 [Paul, to the Thessalonians:] And you became like us and like the Lord. You suffered much, but still you accepted the teaching with *the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit.* NCV™

Gal 5:22–23 But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23]*gentleness, and self-control.* Against such things there is no law. NET

Note the other "fruits" of the Spirit listed here, along with joy and peace.

The Holy Spirit teaches God's people . . .

1Cor 2:13 [Paul:] And *we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things* to spiritual people. NET

The Holy Spirit enables God's people to know and express spiritual truths.

. . . The Holy Spirit teaches God's people about all things

1Jn 2:27 [John, to believers:] Now as for you, the anointing that you received from him resides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you. But as *his anointing teaches you about all things*, it is true and is not a lie. Just as it has taught you, you reside in him. NET

The "anointing" from God is more than likely the Holy Spirit.

Having the Holy Spirit is linked with having wisdom and knowledge

Acts 6:3 [The apostles, to the other believers:] Therefore, brothers, appoint seven men among you who have a good reputation, *who are full of the Spirit and wisdom*, and we will put them in charge of this work. ISV

1Cor 2:11–12 [Paul, to believers:] For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also *no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* [12]*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.* ESV

Being the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit "comprehends the thoughts of God" (v. 11). Having received the Holy Spirit, believers thus gain insight into God's thinking and ways (v. 12).

d) The Holy Spirit Helps God's People

The Holy Spirit helps each believer

Rom 8:26 [Paul, to believers:] In the same way, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings.* NET

John 14:16–17a [Jesus, to his disciples:] I will ask the Father, and *he will give you another Helper to be with you forever—* [17]*the Spirit of truth.* NCV™

The Holy Spirit leads God's people

Rom 8:14 *Those who are led by God's Spirit are God's children.* GNT

Gal 5:18 But if *you are led by the Spirit*, you are not under the law. NET

The Holy Spirit may lead a person by an inner conviction or sense of assurance, by circumstances, or even by a discernible revelation. (Giving such a revelation to a person with a prophetic spiritual gift is one way the Holy Spirit leads and directs Christian groups.)

The Holy Spirit directs God's people in doing God's work

Acts 10:19–20 While Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision, *the Spirit said to him, "Look! Three men are looking for you. [20]But get up, go down, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them."* NET

Acts 20:22 [Paul:] And now, *compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem* without knowing what will happen to me there, … NET

The Holy Spirit empowers God's people to do God's work

Mic 3:8 [The prophet Micah:] As for me, *I am truly filled with power by the Spirit of the Lord, filled with judgment and might to announce to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.* ISV

Acts 1:8 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.* NET

> Through the Holy Spirit the disciples would receive "power (ability, efficiency, and might)" (AMP), enabling them to witness for Christ far and wide.

The Holy Spirit has a significant role in what God's people speak

Matt 10:18–20 [Jesus, to his disciples:] You will be brought before governors and kings because of me, to testify to them and to the gentiles. [19]When they hand you over, don't worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, because *in that hour what you are to say will be given to you. [20]It won't be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* ISV

Acts 4:31 When they [the believers] had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.* NET

> The above verses basically have in view the Holy Spirit helping believers in what they say in doing God's work.

God's people worship and pray by the Holy Spirit

Phil 3:3 [Paul, to believers:] It is we, not they, who have received the true circumcision, for *we worship God by means of his Spirit* and rejoice in our life in union with Christ Jesus. GNT

Eph 6:18 [Paul, to believers:] With every prayer and petition, *pray at all times in the Spirit*, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints. NET

> A further aspect of the Holy Spirit's help of God's people is that they are to worship and pray by or in the Holy Spirit. As such, God's people worship and pray in reliance on the Holy Spirit, under his power and guidance.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 18

God’s Transformation of His People

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I. General

God transforms his people by giving them the invaluable gift of spiritual life, in which they are "reborn" in a spiritual sense. Additionally, God makes them holy and accordingly begins to transform them to be like Jesus Christ and himself. God does this through such things as teaching and disciplining them.

a) God Makes His People Spiritually Alive

God's people have spiritual life

John 6:63 [Jesus, to his followers:] *The Spirit is the one who gives life*; human nature is of no help! *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* NET

Jesus' words together with the Holy Spirit bring life. This spiritual life involves being "alive to God" (Romans 6:11) and comes through having God's Holy Spirit. Each believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, renewing and nourishing them spiritually. Consequently believers have a spiritual consciousness that enables them to live in communion with and in dependence on God. As such they are "alive to God".

One could make a parallel with a person's own spirit enabling them to have physical life (for without one's spirit indwelling one's physical body, the body is dead). Somewhat similarly, having the Holy Spirit enables a person to have spiritual life.

They have passed from their former state of spiritual death to spiritual life

1Jn 3:14 [John, to believers:] We know that *we have passed out of death into life*, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ESV

In union with Jesus Christ, their sinful selves have "died" and they are now spiritually alive

Rom 6:6–8, 11 [Paul, to believers:] We know that *our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* [7]*For one who has died has been set free from sin.* [8]*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* … [11]So you also must *consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* ESV

In our union with Jesus Christ we are identified with him in his death and resurrection. In a spiritual sense our old sinful selves have died with him in his death and we have been made alive spiritually with him in his post-resurrection life.

God's people are spiritually reborn of God . . .

John 1:12–13 But to all who have received him [Jesus] – those who believe in his name – he has given the right to become God's children [13]– *children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.* NET

References to being born by God (v. 13) – or born again – refer to the spiritual rebirth people undergo when they come to faith, and by which they have spiritual life. It is accomplished by God through the work of the Holy Spirit within a person's heart or mind, along with exposure to God's word. This spiritual birth means that believers are in a real sense children of God. It also begins a process of growing more like God, as believers share in his Spirit which transforms them.

. . . They are born again of the Holy Spirit and through God's word

John 3:6–7 [Jesus:] *A person is born physically of human parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit.* [7]Do not be surprised because I tell you that *you must all be born again.* GNT

James 1:18 [James, to believers:] By his sovereign plan *he gave us birth through the message of truth*, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. NET

God's people are a new creation

2Cor 5:17 So then, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – look, what is new has come!* NET

b) God Makes His People Holy

See also:

- *T*, p. 184

The concept of being made holy concerns God's people being set apart for God - dedicated to him, for such purposes as doing his work and worshiping him. This involves them being made pure from sin.

Being made holy has a couple of phases or facets. Firstly, when a person comes to faith their sins are forgiven, and as such they are holy. Secondly, believers are made holy in that they are continually being transformed by God, becoming more like Jesus Christ and increasingly devoid of sin. This process is often referred to as "sanctification".

God makes his people holy . . .

Ex 31:13 [GOD, TO MOSES:] Tell the Israelites, 'Surely you must keep my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that *I am the LORD who sanctifies you*. NET

1Thes 5:23–24 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24]He who calls you is trustworthy, and *he will in fact do this*. NET

. . . God's people are a holy people

1Cor 3:17b For *God's temple is holy, and you are that temple*. ESV

God's "temple" is the church.

God's people are primarily made holy through Jesus Christ's sacrifice

Heb 13:12 So *Jesus also suffered outside the city to make his people holy with his own blood.* NCV™

God's people are being made like God . . .

Col 3:9–10 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices [10]and have put on *the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*. ESV

. . . God's people are being transformed to be like Jesus Christ

2Cor 3:18b [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *We all show the Lord's glory, and we are being changed to be like him.* NCV™

Paul has the development of the believer's sanctification in view, with their characters growing more like Christ. As such believers increasingly reflect and even manifest Christ's glory.

Note: God's people are his workmanship

Eph 2:10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For *we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus* for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them. NET

c) God Teaches His People

See also:

- *T*, p. 185
- ., p. 185
- *d) Wisdom and Knowledge*, p. 195

God teaches his people

John 6:45 [JESUS:] It is written in the prophets, *'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him* comes to me. NCV™

Phil 3:15 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] All of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, too. And *if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you*. NCV™

God teaches his people how to live

Ps 25:9 *He shows those who are humble how to do right, and he teaches them his ways.* NCV™

Ps 32:8 [GOD:] *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;* I will counsel you with my eye upon you. ESV

God enables his people to know the truth

John 8:31–32 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *"If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples* [32]*and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* NET

God makes known things about himself to his people . . .

Ps 103:7 *He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.* ESV

Isa 43:10 The LORD says [to Israel], "You are my witnesses and the servant I chose. *I chose you so you would know and believe me, so you would understand that I am the true God. There was no God before me, and there will be no God after me.* NCV™

. . . and God makes known other things of his to his people

Eph 1:17–19 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him,* [18]– since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened – *so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints,* [19]*and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe,* as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength. NET

> The fact that Paul prays that the Ephesians would know these things is indicative that he saw God as ultimately the source of such knowledge.

God reveals unknown and concealed things to his people

Isa 48:6b [GOD, TO HIS PEOPLE:] *From this point on I am announcing to you new events that are previously unrevealed and you do not know about.* NET

1Cor 2:9–10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But just as it is written, *"Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him."* [10]*God has revealed these to us by the Spirit.* For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. NET

d) God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons

When his people turn to sin, God punishes and disciplines them . . .

Jer 30:14b [GOD, TO ISRAEL:] I have attacked you like an enemy; *your punishment has been harsh because your sins are many and your wickedness is great.* GNT

Ps 39:11 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You correct and punish people for their sins …* NCV™

. . . By punishment and discipline God causes his people to seek him again

Hos 5:14–15 [GOD:] I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a young lion to the house of Judah. *I myself will tear them to pieces, then I will carry them off, and no one will be able to rescue them!* [15]Then I will return again to my lair *until they have suffered their punishment. Then they will seek me; in their distress they will earnestly seek me.* NET

God disciplines his people to rid them of sin

Ps 119:67 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.* ESV

God disciplines them to save them from sin's consequences

1Cor 11:32 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But *when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned with the world.* NET

Isa 38:17 [HEZEKIAH, TO GOD:] *Look, the grief I experienced was for my benefit. You delivered me from the pit of oblivion. For you removed all my sins from your sight.* NET

> Here Hezekiah speaks of a time of intense suffering, which he attributes to God's punishment or discipline for sin. His words point to the fact that those who respond appropriately to God's discipline are forgiven for their sins and no longer face destruction.

However, hard times from God are not always due to sin

Ps 44:14, 17, 22 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You have made us an object of contempt among the nations; they shake their heads at us in scorn. ...* [17]*All this has happened to us, even though we have not forgotten you or broken the covenant you made with us. ...* [22]But *it is on your account that we are being killed all the time, that we are treated like sheep to be slaughtered.* GNT

> Not only was the people's suffering from God not due to sin, but it was because of their faithfulness to him that they were looked upon as objects suitable for abuse and even death (v. 22). This illustrates that discipline or suffering is not necessarily due to sin. Often the reason may in fact not be apparent.

God also tests his people to show if they will obey him

Deut 8:2 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Remember how *the LORD your God led you all the way these 40 years in the desert, to humble and test you in order to make known what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.* ISV

Further reasons why God disciplines and tests his people

Heb 12:9–11 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *On earth we have fathers who disciplined us, and we respect them. Shouldn't we place ourselves under the authority of God, the father of spirits, so that we will live?* [10]For a short time our fathers disciplined us as they thought best. Yet, *God disciplines us for our own good so that we can become holy like him.* [11]We don't enjoy being disciplined. It always seems to cause more pain than joy. But later on, *those who learn from that discipline have peace that comes from doing what is right.* GW

James 1:2–3 [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, [3]because you know that *the testing of your faith produces endurance.* NET

e) God Disciplines His People (II): Insights

God disciplines his people as his children, who he loves

Heb 12:5–8 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] And have you forgotten *the exhortation addressed to you as sons? "My son, do not scorn the Lord's discipline or give up when he corrects you.* [6]*"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts."* [7]*Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?* [8]*But if you do not experience discipline, something all sons have shared in, then you are illegitimate and are not sons.* NET

God's discipline is characterized by righteousness and faithfulness

Neh 9:30–31, 33 [LEVITES, PRAYING TO GOD AND MAKING REFERENCE TO THEIR FOREFATHERS:] You prolonged your kindness with them for many years, and you solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. *Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.* [31]*However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether*; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God. ... [33]*You are righteous with regard to all that has happened to us, for you have acted faithfully.* It is we who have been in the wrong! NET

> As well as speaking of his patience and mercy, vv. 30–31 beautifully illustrate God's righteousness and faithfulness in his discipline and dealings with his people, affirmed in v. 33.

God's punishment of his people is warranted . . .

Ezek 16:59 *Jerusalem, you deserve to be punished, because you broke your promises and ignored our agreement.* CEV

Ezek 14:23 [GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] They will console you when you see their behavior and their deeds, because *you will know that it was not without reason that I have done everything which I have done in it*, declares the sovereign LORD. NET

> God assured Ezekiel that when he saw the ungodliness of those who had remained in

Jerusalem, he would realize that God had done nothing in his destruction of it without good reason.

. . . and God's punishment is often less than what his people's sins really deserve

Ezra 9:13 [Ezra, to God:] After all that has happened to us because of our evil behavior, and because of our great sin—considering that *you our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve* and have given us this deliverance— ... ISV

God's discipline is temporary . . .

Ps 30:5 *His anger lasts only a moment,* but his kindness lasts for a lifetime. *Crying may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.* NCV™

The reference to God's anger speaks of his discipline and punishment.

. . . Due to his compassion, God limits his people's punishment

Neh 9:28 [Levites, praying to God and making reference to their forefathers:] But after they had gained relief, they returned to doing evil before you. Therefore *you abandoned them to the control of their enemies, who continued to oppress them. But when they came back and cried out to you, you listened from heaven and delivered them in your compassion on many occasions.* ISV

Lam 3:31–32 [Jeremiah, reflecting on the plight of his people:] For *the Lord will not reject us forever.* [32]*Though he causes us grief, he then has compassion on us* according to the abundance of his loyal kindness. NET

God's discipline and testing can be intense, but God brings his people through

Ps 66:10–12 [A psalmist, to God:] *You have put us to the test, God; as silver is purified by fire so you have tested us.* [11]*You let us fall into a trap and placed heavy burdens on our backs.* [12]*You let our enemies trample over us; we went through fire and flood, but now you have brought us to a place of safety.* GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Spiritual Attributes

The spiritual attributes that God bestows on his people far exceed anything that this world can offer. Attributes or blessings such as love, hope, joy, peace and wisdom are longed for by most people, and sought after in many ways. But it is only from God that they can be gained in their highest form.

a) Love, Faith and Hope

See also:

- *T*, p. 185

Love, faith and hope form a key triad of spiritual graces or attributes. They are linked a number of times in the NT, most famously in 1 Corinthians 13:13 – "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

God gives his people love . . .

Eph 6:23 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Peace to the brothers and sisters, and *love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. NET

. . . God enables his people to love

1Thes 4:9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now on the topic of brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write you, for *you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*. NET

God gives his people faith

Rom 12:3b [PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS IN ROME:] *God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith*. NET

God gives his people hope – especially by what he has done through Jesus Christ

2Thes 2:16a [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God our Father loved us and by his kindness gave us everlasting encouragement and good hope*. GW

1Pet 1:3–4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah! Because of his great mercy *he has given us a new birth to an ever-living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, from the dead* [4]*and to an inheritance kept in heaven for you that can't be destroyed, corrupted, or changed.* ISV

Through Jesus Christ's resurrection, God has brought believers into an "ever-living hope" (v. 3). This encompasses the hope of their own resurrection and an everlasting inheritance in heaven (v. 4).

God's promises give his people hope

Heb 6:17–18 *To those who were to receive what he promised, God wanted to make it very clear that he would never change his purpose; so he added his vow to the promise.* [18]*There are these two things, then, that cannot change and about which God cannot lie. So we who have found safety with him are greatly encouraged to hold firmly to the hope placed before us.* GNT

This indicates that "the hope placed before us" (v. 18) by God is based on, or comes from, his promise that is referred to and his confirmation of it with an oath – the "two things... that cannot change" (v. 18).

God's promises to his people include promises for the present life . . .

Acts 2:38–39 Peter said to them, *"Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* [39]*For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself."* NET

Ps 119:76, 116a [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *May your loyal love console me, as you promised your servant. ...* [116]*Sustain me as you promised, so that I will live.* NET

In these verses "as you promised" refers to promise of deliverance.

. . . and promises for the afterlife – notably the promise of eternal life

2Pet 3:13 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] But, *according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides*. NET

Titus 1:2 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF BELIEVERS:] Then they will have *the hope of eternal life that God promised long ago*. And God never tells a lie! CEV

b) Peace

See also:

- *T*, p. 185

OT references to the peace that God gives to his people encompass both inner peace (including being at ease) and outer peace (the absence of war and adversity). In addition to peace with God, the NT speaks of God giving his people an inner, spiritual peace – even amidst adversity. The NT also speaks of God engendering peace or harmony amongst groups of believers.

God gives his people peace

Ps 29:11 The LORD gives strength to his people; *the LORD blesses his people with peace*. NCV™

Col 1:2 [PAUL:] To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ that live in Colosse: Grace and *peace to you from God our Father.* NCV™

God provides his people with rest

Ex 33:14 And *the LORD said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* NET

Jesus Christ gives God's people peace . . .

John 14:27 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you*; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage. NET

John 16:33 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] I have told you these things so that *in me you may have peace*. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world. NET

Because Jesus Christ has overcome the world, in him believers have peace amidst the trouble that the world causes them.

. . . and Jesus Christ gives his people rest

Matt 11:28–30 [JESUS:] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and *I will give you rest*. [29]Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and *you will find rest for your souls.* [30]*For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.* NET

Here "rest" appears to encompass (or at least be applicable to) rest from: trying to obey the OT law in order to be righteous before God, particularly with how it was embellished by the Jews; the burden of sin; and any troubles in our lives that weary and burden us.

God's people have great peace

Isa 26:3 *The LORD gives perfect peace to those whose faith is firm.* CEV

Phil 4:6–7 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. [7]*And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* NET

2Thes 3:16 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may the Lord of peace himself *give you peace at all times and in every way*. The Lord be with you all. NET

Note that this is primarily speaking of peace amongst believers.

God's people have peace and rest even in death

Isa 57:2 *Those who live good lives find peace and rest in death.* GNT

Note: God is the God of peace

Rom 15:33 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may *the God of peace* be with all of you. Amen. NET

c) Joy

See also:

- *T*, p. 185

God gives joy to his people

Ps 97:11 Light is sown for the righteous, and *joy for the upright in heart*. ESV

God and Jesus Christ give their people fullness of joy

Rom 15:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of hope fill you with all joy* and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. NET

John 15:10–11 [Jesus, to his disciples:] If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11*I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.* NET

The joy is present even in trouble

Ps 94:19 [A psalmist, to God:] *When my anxious inner thoughts become overwhelming, your comfort makes me glad.* ISV

2Cor 8:2 *They* [churches in Macedonia] *have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great* that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor. GNT

Promises of God replacing sorrow with joy

Isa 35:10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; *everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* ESV

Jer 31:11–13 For the Lord will rescue the descendants of Jacob. He will secure their release from those who had overpowered them. 12*They will come and shout for joy on Mount Zion. They will be radiant with joy over the good things the Lord provides*, the grain, the fresh wine, the olive oil, the young sheep and calves he has given to them. They will be like a well–watered garden and will not grow faint or weary any more. 13*The Lord says, "At that time young women will dance and be glad. Young men and old men will rejoice. I will turn their grief into gladness. I will give them comfort and joy in place of their sorrow.* NET

Note: God's joy strengthens people

Neh 8:10 He [Nehemiah] said to them, "Go and eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for *the joy of the Lord is your strength*." NET

> The grief of the people would be offset through them drawing strength from the joy they had in the Lord, or the "joy that the Lord gives" (GNT, cf. CEV).

d) Wisdom and Knowledge

See also:

- *H*, p. 185
- *c) God Teaches His People*, p. 189

> Note that in the Bible "knowledge" generally refers to spiritual knowledge, indicative of a clear comprehension of things of God. This is particularly so in the NT.

God gives his people wisdom

James 1:5 But *if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him.* NET

James 3:17 But *the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and not hypocritical.* NET

God gives his people knowledge

Eccl 2:26 *God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to anyone who pleases him.* GW

Matt 13:11 He [Jesus] answered them, "*You have been given knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven*, but it hasn't been given to them. ISV

> Jesus revealed God's hidden teachings of the kingdom of heaven to his disciples but not to others in the crowds. Presumably this was in part at least because the others were not open to believing and/or were not prepared to intently seek the truth.

God's people are given spiritual sight . . .

Eph 1:17–19 [Paul, to believers:] I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him, 18– since *the eyes of your heart have been enlightened* – so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength. NET

Ps 119:18 [A psalmist, to God:] *Open my eyes so I can truly see the marvelous things in your law!* NET

As suggested by the psalmist's request, God opens his people's eyes to spiritual truth.

. . . They have spiritual light instead of spiritual darkness

1Pet 2:9 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of *the one* [God] *who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*. NET

John 8:12 Then *Jesus spoke out again, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* NET

The light that Jesus gives enables one to recognize and avoid "darkness" or falsehood – including false ideologies and ways of life – and shows the way to spiritual life.

Note: The exceptional wisdom that God gave to Solomon

1Ki 4:29–31 *God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment; the breadth of his understanding was as infinite as the sand on the seashore.* [30]*Solomon was wiser than all the men of the east and all the sages of Egypt.* [31]*He was wiser than any man*, including Ethan the Ezrahite or Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. He was famous in all the neighboring nations. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 19

God’s Care of His People

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I. God's Saving of His People

See also:

- *13. Salvation through Jesus Christ*, p. 135

God has the capacity to save his people always – no matter what the circumstances. Thus God can save his people from all things – and ultimately he does. The Bible contains both numerous examples of God saving his people and promises of him continuing to do so.

In reading this chapter about God's saving and preservation of his people, one should bear in mind that the Bible also speaks of God's people experiencing sufferings common to all people (cf. *39. Hard Times*, p. 421); and also persecution for their faith (cf. *40. Persecution*, p. 431). God can and does save and preserve his people, but also does allow or even ordain difficult experiences for his people – often for reasons that may not be clear.

Promises given in the OT of God saving and preserving his people are still very much relevant under the new covenant – as is reflected in a number of NT passages. But they are more applicable in a spiritual sense – in keeping with the greater spiritual nature of the second covenant in contrast to the often more tangible aspects of the first covenant. As such we should bear in mind C. H. Spurgeon's words: "It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord...Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach his honour, death is his gain". (See also the introductory comment under *G*, p. 199.)

a) God's Capacity to Save His People

God is able to save his people – no matter what the circumstances

Dan 3:17 [SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO TO KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR:] *If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us* from the furnace. He will save us from your power, O king. NCV™

1Sam 14:6b *Nothing can prevent the LORD from delivering, whether by many or by a few.* NET

God has mighty power to save his people . . .

Zeph 3:17a The LORD your God is with you; *the mighty One will save you.* NCV™

Acts 13:17b Then *with his mighty power he led them out* [of captivity in Egypt], ... CEV

. . . God can perform awesome deeds to save them

Deut 26:8 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Therefore *the LORD brought us out of Egypt with tremendous strength and power, as well as with great awe–inspiring signs and wonders.* NET

Dan 6:27 [KING DARIUS, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.* ESV

The implication is that God can perform "signs and wonders" in delivering people, as he did in saving Daniel.

God does not need to use any other means but himself to save his people

Hos 1:7 [GOD:] But I will show pity to the people of Judah. *I will save them, but not by using bows or swords, horses or horsemen, or weapons of war. I, the LORD their God, will save them.* NCV™

Here God speaks of saving his people by no other power but himself.

Note: Salvation belongs to God – for he is the only savior

Jonah 2:9 *Salvation belongs to the LORD!* NET

Isa 43:11 I, I am the LORD, and *besides me there is no savior.* ESV

In saying that salvation belongs to God and that he is the only savior, the Bible implies that though salvation or deliverance from trouble may take different forms, ultimately God is behind it.

b) God Saves His People – from All Things

God is the Savior of his people

Ps 25:5 [David, to God:] Guide me in your truth, and teach me, *my God, my Savior.* I trust you all day long. NCV™

God saves them out of all troubles

Ps 34:4–6, 17, 19 [David:] I sought the Lord's help and he answered me; *he delivered me from all my fears.* [5]Those who look to him for help are happy; their faces are not ashamed. [6]This oppressed man cried out and the Lord heard; *he saved him from all his troubles.* ... [17]The godly cry out and the Lord hears; *he saves them from all their troubles.* ... [19]*The godly face many dangers, but the Lord saves them from each one of them.* NET

2Tim 4:17–18 [Paul:] However, the Lord stood by me and gave me strength so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles could hear it. *I was rescued out of a lion's mouth.* [18]*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* Glory belongs to him forever and ever! Amen. ISV

> Christ had rescued Paul from physical danger (v. 17) – in fact he had done so many times (cf. 3:11). However in light of vv. 6–8 which indicate that Paul's death was near, it appears that in v. 18 Paul is not this time referring to a physical rescue but a spiritual one – where the Lord would bring him "safely to his heavenly kingdom".

God saves his people from all their enemies

2Ki 17:39 Instead you [the Israelites] must worship the Lord your God; then *he will rescue you from the power of all your enemies.* NET

2Chr 32:22 *The Lord delivered Hezekiah and the residents of Jerusalem from the power of King Sennacherib of Assyria and from all the other nations. He made them secure on every side.* NET

On delivering them, God may even honor his people

Ps 91:15 [God, speaking of one who loves him:] When he calls out to me, I will answer him. I will be with him when he is in trouble; *I will rescue him and bring him honor.* NET

Note: God is the light of his people, giving them light . . .

Ps 27:1a [David:] *The Lord is my light and my salvation.* GW

Ps 118:27a *The Lord is our God, and he has given us light!* CEV

> OT verses that speak of God giving light to his people generally use "light" to represent that which extends from God's favor, such as salvation and well-being (cf. *NIV Study Bible*). By such things, metaphorically speaking the darkness of one's circumstances is turned to light.

. . . God gives them light even in the midst of darkness

Job 29:3 [Job:] *God's lamp shined on my head, and I walked through darkness by his light.* NCV™

Mic 7:8 [Israel:] My enemies, do not gloat over me! Though I have fallen, I will get up. *Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.* NET

c) God Redeems His People

See also:

- *c) Jesus Christ's Death and Redemption from Sin*, p. 137

> God redeems his people from adversity in that he rescues them and sets them free from it.

God is the Redeemer of his people . . .

Isa 47:4 [Israel:] *Our Redeemer—the Lord of hosts is his name*—is the Holy One of Israel. ESV

. . . God redeems his people

Ps 34:22 *The Lord redeems the lives of his servants*; and none of those who trust in him will be held guilty. ISV

Isa 43:1 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for *I have redeemed you*; I have called you by name, you are mine. ESV

God redeems his people from enemies

Jer 31:11 For *the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him*. ESV

God sets them free from suffering and things that imprison

Luke 13:10–13 Now he [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, [11]and a woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten herself up completely. [12]When Jesus saw her, he called her to him and said, *"Woman, you are freed from your infirmity."* [13]*Then he placed his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.* NET

Ps 116:16 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant and the son of your female servant. *You have freed me from my chains.* NCV™

God will redeem his people from death

Hos 13:14a [GOD:] *From the power of Sheol I will rescue them, from death I will redeem them.* O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? ISV

Note: God vindicates his people

Ps 135:14 For *the LORD vindicates his people*, and has compassion on his servants. NET

> To vindicate someone is to clear them from blame; one could say it means to free or redeem from blame.

d) God Helps His People against Enemies

God helps his people in need, including against enemies

Ps 121:1–2 [A PSALMIST:] I look up toward the hills. *From where does my help come?* [2]*My help comes from the LORD, the Creator of heaven and earth!* NET

> Help against enemies would appear to be at least partially in view here (cf. v. 7).

God consistently helps his people in need

Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, *an ever-present help in times of trouble*. GW

Acts 26:22a [PAUL:] *I have experienced help from God to this day …* NET

God helps his people by delivering them from enemies

Ps 37:40 *The LORD helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from evil men and delivers them*, for they seek his protection. NET

Heb 13:6 So we can say with confidence, "*The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" NET

God helps his people defeat enemies

Ps 118:7 *The LORD is with me to help me, so I will see my enemies defeated.* NCV™

For God fights for his people, giving victory over enemies

2Chr 20:15, 17, 22, 29 He [Jahaziel, a Levite] said: "Pay attention, all you people of Judah, residents of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Don't be afraid and don't panic because of this huge army! *For the battle is not yours, but God's. …* [17]*You will not fight in this battle. Take your positions, stand, and watch the LORD deliver you*, O Judah and Jerusalem. Don't be afraid and don't panic! Tomorrow march out toward them; the LORD is with you!'" … [22]When they began to shout and praise, *the LORD suddenly attacked the Ammonites, Moabites, and men from Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.* … [29]All the kingdoms of

the surrounding lands were afraid of God when they heard how *the LORD had fought against Israel's enemies*. NET

God enables his people to overcome all that is in the world

Rom 8:31, 35, 37 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] What then shall we say about these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us? ...* [35]*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...* [37]*No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!* NET

> Verse 31b implies that if God is for us then no one can effectively oppose us. In all adversity we have complete victory through Christ (v. 37).

God enables his people to overcome Satan

1Jn 2:14b [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I have written to you, young people, that you are strong, and *the word of God resides in you, and you have conquered the evil one*. NET

> The reference to the word of God living in these believers implies that it played a significant role in them overcoming Satan. As such this points to God enabling his people to overcome Satan.

e) God Is Revealed in Saving His People

See also:

- *d) God's Judgment Reveals God*, p. 102

God's saving of his people makes known his salvation to the nations

Isa 52:9–10 Break out into shouts of joy, ruins of Jerusalem. *The LORD will comfort his people. He will reclaim Jerusalem.* [10]*The LORD will show his holy power to all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.* GW

> This speaks of future deliverance for Jerusalem, in which God would demonstrate his holy power, causing all nations to see his salvation (v. 10).

God's saving of his people makes known that he is the only God

Deut 4:34–35 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Or *has any god ever tried to come and take one nation away from another for himself? The LORD your God used his mighty hand and powerful arm to do this for you in Egypt. He did this using plagues, miraculous signs, amazing things, and war. He did his great and awe-inspiring deeds in front of you.* [35]*You were shown these things so that you would know that the LORD is God. There is no other god.* GW

God's saving of his people reveals God's great power

Ps 106:8 Yet *he delivered them for the sake of his reputation, that he might reveal his power.* NET

> This refers to God delivering Israel from the Egyptians.

God's saving of his people reveals God's glory

Isa 44:23b The LORD saved the people of Jacob! *He showed his glory when he saved Israel.* NCV™

God's saving of his people evidences God's love and faithfulness

Ps 57:3 [DAVID:] *He will answer from heaven and save me; he will defeat my oppressors. God will show me his constant love and faithfulness.* GNT

God's saving of his people shows God's holiness and righteousness

Ezek 28:25 This is what the Lord God says: *I will gather the people of Israel from the nations where they are scattered. I will show my holiness when the nations see what I do for my people.* Then they will live in their own land—the land I gave to my servant Jacob. NCV™

Ps 98:2 *The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.* ESV

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God's Preservation of His People

As with verses which speak of God's saving of his people, verses which speak of God's preservation of his people are amongst the best-loved verses in the Bible. They contain some of the Bible's great promises, which reassure us when we wonder if God has "lost our address". As such they provide good reason for God's people to trust in him and be at peace.

a) God Meets His People's Needs

Note that the first subsection below points to the overall theme of this chapter. As such it is reflected in and pertinent to the whole chapter, not just this section.

God cares for his people

Zec 10:3b *The LORD of Armies takes care of his flock*, the people of Judah. He makes them like his splendid war horse. GW

1Pet 5:6–7 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand [7]by casting all your cares on him because *he cares for you*. NET

God sustains his people

Ps 3:5 [DAVID:] I lay down and slept; I woke again, for *the LORD sustained me*. ESV

God meets his people's physical needs

Prov 10:3 *The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry*, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. ESV

1Tim 6:17 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on *God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy*. ESV

It can be inferred from the final clause that God provides us with everything we need (cf. CEV, NLT), with physical needs being primarily in view here.

God meets their physical needs even in harsh circumstances

Neh 9:21 [LEVITES, TO GOD:] *For forty years you sustained them. Even in the desert they never lacked anything. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.* NET

Ps 23:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*; you anoint my head with oil; *my cup overflows*. ESV

Even amidst adversaries, God provided for David – as implied by "prepare a table [feast] before me" and "my cup overflows".

God satisfies his people's spiritual hunger and thirst

Matt 5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.* NET

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, *"I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.* NET

God provides for all their needs – they will not lack anything

Phil 4:19 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED HIM:] And *my God will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus*. NET

Luke 22:35 Then Jesus said to them [his disciples], *"When I sent you out with no money bag, or traveler's bag, or sandals, you didn't lack anything, did you?" They replied, "Nothing."* NET

Note: God is his people's portion

Ps 73:25–26 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* [26]*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* ESV

The question (v. 25a) implies that not only did the psalmist not have anyone nor anything else in heaven, he also did not long for such. In saying that God was his "portion forever" (v. 26) the psalmist appears to mean that God was all he would ever need (cf. GNT) or desire (v. 25b).

b) God Strengthens His People

See also:

- *c) God Works through His People (II): Empowerment*, p. 212

God is the strength of his people

Ps 28:7–8 [DAVID:] *The LORD is my strength* and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. [8]*The LORD is the strength of his people*; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. ESV

God strengthens his people

Eph 3:16 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, …* NET

Phil 4:13 [PAUL, REFERRING TO CHRIST:] *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* ESV

God strengthens his people when they are weak . . .

Isa 40:30–31 *Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;* [31]*but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* ESV

. . . God restores and renews his people

1Pet 5:10 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] After you have suffered for a little while, *the God of all grace, who called you in the Messiah Jesus to his eternal glory, will restore you, establish you, strengthen you, and support you*. ISV

2Cor 4:16 [PAUL:] Therefore we do not despair, but *even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day*. NET

God strengthens his people in the face of adversity

Ps 18:39 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You give me strength for battle*; you make my foes kneel before me. NET

2Tim 4:16–17 [PAUL:] *At my first defense no one appeared in my support; instead they all deserted me* – may they not be held accountable for it. [17]*But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me*, so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed for all the Gentiles to hear. And so I was delivered from the lion's mouth! NET

> Note that in Paul's letters "Lord" is generally understood to be a reference to Jesus Christ.

God strengthens them spiritually, until Jesus Christ's return

Col 1:11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You are being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you might patiently endure everything with joy …* ISV

1Cor 1:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* NET

God encourages his people

2Thes 2:16–17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, [17]*encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good thing you do or say*. NET

God heals his people

Ps 30:2 [DAVID:] *O LORD my God, I cried out to you and you healed me.* NET

James 5:14–16 [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] Is anyone among you ill? He should summon the elders of the church, and they should pray for him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. [15]And *the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up* – and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16]*So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed*. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness. NET

> The topic of healing is a somewhat controversial one. Does God promise to heal all illness, if we have faith that he will? This passage and Psalms 103:3 support the affirmative. 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 and the fact that numerous people of faith have remained ill after repeated prayer, suggest otherwise. However we do know that God wants his people to take all such needs to him in prayer, in

assurance that he will hear and act for one's ultimate good and in line with his will.

God also supports and upholds his people . . .

Ps 94:18 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] If I say, "My foot is slipping," *your loyal love, O LORD, supports me*. NET

Ps 37:23–24 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. [24]*Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.* NKJV

. . . God even carries them

Isa 46:3–4 [GOD:] Family of Jacob, listen to me! All you people from Israel who are still alive, listen! *I have carried you since you were born*; I have taken care of you from your birth. [4]Even when you are old, I will be the same. Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of you. I made you and will take care of you. *I will carry you and save you.* NCV™

In supporting and upholding his people, God is at times figuratively spoken of as carrying them.

c) God Protects His People (I): General

God protects his people

Josh 24:17b [JOSHUA, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *He continually protected us as we traveled and when we passed through nations.* NET

Ps 32:7 [DAVID, TO GOD:] You are my hiding place; *you protect me from distress*. You surround me with shouts of joy from those celebrating deliverance. (Selah) NET

God protects his people from enemies

Ps 31:20 *You are their shelter from harmful plots, and you are their protection from vicious gossip.* CEV

Ps 91:14 The LORD says, "Because he is devoted to me, I will deliver him; *I will protect him because he is loyal to me*. NET

God preserves his people's lives . . .

Ps 138:7 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life*; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. ESV

. . . God keeps his people safe and secure

Ps 16:8–9 [DAVID:] I have set the LORD always before me; *because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.* [9]*Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.* ESV

God protects his people from Satan and all evil

2Thes 3:3 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But the Lord is faithful, and *he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one*. NET

Ps 23:4 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* ESV

God and Jesus Christ keep their people as their own – until the end

John 6:39 [JESUS:] Now *this is the will of the one who sent me – that I should not lose one person of every one he has given me, but raise them all up at the last day.* NET

John 10:28–29 [JESUS:] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and *no one will snatch them out of my hand*. [29]My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and *no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*. ESV

God and Jesus Christ keep their people as their own, in a right relationship with them. In doing so they shield their people from spiritual harm throughout their lives, bringing their salvation to fruition at the end of the age.

d) God Protects His People (II): Depictions

God shields his people

Ps 33:20 [Godly people:] We wait on the Lord; *he is our help and our shield*. ISV

Ps 140:7 [David, to God:] O sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer, *you shield my head in the day of battle*. NET

God surrounds his people

Ps 125:2 *As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, now and forevermore.* NET

Ps 34:7 *The Lord's angel camps around the Lord's loyal followers* and delivers them. NET

God is a refuge for his people

2Sam 22:2–3 He [David] said, *"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, 3my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge*, my savior; you save me from violence. ESV

God guards his people . . .

Ps 121:4–8 *Look! The one who is guarding Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. 5The Lord is your guardian; the Lord is your shade at your right side. 6The sun will not ravage you by day, nor the moon by night. 7The Lord will guard you from all evil, preserving your life. 8The Lord will guard your goings and comings, from this time on and forever.* ISV

Ps 91:11 For *he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways*. ESV

. . . God watches over his people

Prov 2:8 God sees that justice is done, and *he watches over everyone who is faithful to him*. CEV

God is a shepherd to his people . . .

Ps 23:1–4 [David:] *The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2He takes me to lush pastures, he leads me to refreshing water. 3He restores my strength. He leads me down the right paths* for the sake of his reputation. *4Even when I must walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff reassure me.* NET

> In portraying God as a shepherd (and his people as sheep) the Bible points to how God protects, rescues, leads, provides and generally cares for his people. In conjunction with this, the analogy depicts his close relationship with his people.

. . . Jesus Christ is a shepherd to his people

John 10:14–15 [Jesus:] *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me – 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.* NET

e) Epilogue: God's Care of the Needy

> Bear in mind that while many verses in the Bible assert that God looks after the needy, the Bible also speaks of the suffering of the needy. As such the Bible often speaks of God delivering the needy as opposed to keeping them from experiencing any troubles (just as it often speaks of God saving his people out of troubles as opposed to keeping them from experiencing any troubles, though the latter is also spoken of). Additionally, note that much of the teaching in this section is often interpreted as generality.
>
> In considering the plight of the needy and God's response, we should also remember that the Bible often refers to God working through his people to achieve his purposes. One can infer from this that a good part of what God does to secure justice and protection for the needy – as spoken of in this section – he does through his people.

The needy are often mistreated by the wicked and made to suffer

Job 20:19 For *he* [a wicked person] *has oppressed the poor and abandoned them; he has seized a house which he did not build.* NET

Eccl 4:1 [A wise teacher:] So *I again considered all the oppression that continually occurs on earth. This is what I saw: The oppressed were in tears, but no one was comforting them; no one delivers them from the power of their oppressors.* NET

However, God rescues the needy

Ps 35:10 [David:] With all my strength I will say, "O Lord, who can compare to you? *You rescue the oppressed from those who try to overpower them; the oppressed and needy from those who try to rob them.* NET

Ps 109:31 [David, speaking of God:] For *he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death*. ESV

God secures justice for the needy

Ps 140:12 [David:] *I know that the Lord will act on behalf of the tormented, providing justice for the needy.* ISV

God protects and is a refuge for the needy

Ps 12:5 "Because of the violence done to the oppressed, because of the painful cries of the needy, I will spring into action," says the Lord. *"I will provide the safety they so desperately desire."* NET

Isa 25:4a *You* [God] *have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rain, and shade from the heat.* GW

God provides for the needy

Ps 68:10b *Out of your goodness, O God, you provided for oppressed people.* GW

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 20

God’s Plans for His People

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I. General

God has wonderful plans and purposes for his people. Many of these concern the work he does through his people, with his incomparably great power. God promises to fulfill these plans and purposes, equipping and guiding his people accordingly.

a) God Has Plans and Purposes for His People

Bear in mind that references to God's plans and purposes for his people include: general plans/purposes which apply to all Christians; and specific plans/purposes for each Christian. The various general ones – such as salvation and sanctification – are dealt with in a number of other chapters in this book. This section looks at topics which show that God has specific plans and purposes for each of his people.

Thus the verses have largely been interpreted as such, i.e. as speaking of God having plans or purposes for specific people, or specific groups of his people. However, note that a number of the verses are also applicable to God's general plans and purposes, and arguably may even have these foremost in view.

God has plans and purposes for his people

Ps 40:5 [David, to God:] You have done many things for us, O Lord our God; there is no one like you! *You have made many wonderful plans for us. I could never speak of them all—their number is so great!* GNT

Acts 13:36 For David, after *he had served God's purpose in his own generation*, died and was laid to rest with his ancestors, and so he experienced decay. ISV

God's plans and purposes include work for his people to do

Eph 2:10 [Paul, to believers:] God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus *he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.* GNT

1Cor 3:5 [Paul, to the believers at Corinth:] Is Apollos important? No! Is Paul important? No! We are only servants of God who helped you believe. Each one of us did *the work God gave us to do.* NCV™

God's plans and purposes are not dependent upon a person's background

Amos 7:14–15 Amos replied to Amaziah, *"I was not a prophet by profession. No, I was a herdsman who also took care of sycamore fig trees.* [15]*Then the Lord took me from tending flocks and gave me this commission, 'Go! Prophesy to my people Israel!'* NET

In spite of his people's troubles, God will fulfill his plans and purposes for them

Ps 138:7–8a [David, to God:] *Though I walk straight into trouble,* you preserve my life, stretching out your hand to fight the vehemence of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. [8]*The Lord will complete what his purpose is for me.* ISV

Jer 29:10–11 For the Lord says, 'Only *when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over* will I again take up consideration for you. *Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland.* [11]*For I know what I have planned for you,' says the Lord. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.* NET

Despite his people's exile in Babylon and the apparent decimation of Israel as a nation, God would fulfill his promise and plans for them.

God may actually use his people's troubles in fulfilling his purposes for them . . .

Luke 21:12–13 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But before all this, *they will seize you and persecute you, handing you over to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.* [13]*This will be a time for you to serve as witnesses.* NET

This implies that at times God allows persecution, using it to spread the Gospel.

. . . God may even initiate seemingly bad things to fulfill his purposes for his people

Gen 45:4–8 Joseph told them to come closer to him, and when they did, he said: Yes, *I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.* [5]*Don't worry or blame yourselves for what you did. God is the one who sent me ahead of you to save lives.* [6]There has already been a famine for two years, and for five more years no one will plow fields or harvest grain. [7]But *God sent me on ahead of you to keep your families alive and to save you in this wonderful way.* [8]*After all, you weren't really the ones who sent me here—it was God.* He made me the highest official in the king's court and placed me over all Egypt. CEV

Note: The plans of God's people are subject to his will

Heb 6:3 [The writer to the Hebrews:] And *this is what we intend to do, if God permits*. NET

1Cor 4:19a [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] But *I will come to you soon if it's the Lord's will*. ISV

b) God Works through His People (I): General

As mentioned earlier, God's plans and purposes for his people include tasks or work for his people to do for him. In fulfilling these plans and purposes, God works through his people.

Note that while most of the headings do not refer to Jesus Christ, as is often the case in this book (particularly in Part D), the verses often show that what is said of God is also applicable to Christ.

God works through his people

Hos 12:13 Later *the Lord used a prophet to bring Jacob's descendants out of Egypt; he used a prophet to take care of the Israelites*. NCV™

2Cor 13:3a [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] You will have all the proof you want that *Christ speaks through me*. GNT

God works through his people in the spreading of the gospel

Acts 14:27 When they [Paul and Barnabas] arrived, they called the members of the church together. *They reported everything God had done through them, especially that he had given people who were not Jewish the opportunity to believe.* GW

Rom 15:18–19 [Paul:] I will be bold and speak only about *what Christ has done through me to lead the Gentiles to obey God. He has done this by means of words and deeds,* [19]*by the power of miracles and wonders, and by the power of the Spirit of God. And so, in travelling all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, I have proclaimed fully the Good News about Christ.* GNT

God purifies his people to do his work . . .

Zeph 3:9 [God:] Then *I will give all people pure lips to worship the Lord and to serve him with one purpose.* GW

The reference is to all nations in the future, but this is still illustrative of the fact that in all eras God purifies and makes his people holy for them to serve him.

. . . Jesus Christ effectively makes them priests to serve God

Rev 1:5b–6 To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood [6]and *has appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God and Father* – to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever! Amen. NET

God sends his people to do his work . . .

Ezek 2:3–4 [God, to Ezekiel:] Mortal man, *I am sending you to the people of Israel*. They have rebelled and turned against me and are still rebels, just as their ancestors were. [4]They are stubborn and do not respect me, so *I am sending you to tell them what I, the Sovereign Lord, am saying to them*. GNT

Matt 28:19–20 [Jesus, to his disciples:] Therefore *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,* [20]*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. NET

. . . and God moves his people to do his work

Phil 2:12b–13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, [13]because *God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose*. GNT

Ezra 1:5 Then the leaders of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and the Levites – *all those whose mind God had stirred – got ready to go up in order to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem*. NET

God works with his people, helping them

Neh 6:16 [NEHEMIAH:] When all our enemies heard and all the nations who were around us saw this, they were greatly disheartened. *They knew that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God*. NET

Mark 16:20 The disciples went and preached everywhere, and *the Lord* [Jesus] *worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by the miracles that were performed*. GNT

God makes it possible for his people to do the work

2Cor 2:12 [PAUL:] When I arrived in Troas to preach the Good News about Christ, *I found that the Lord had opened the way for the work there*. GNT

2Cor 9:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And *God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work*. ESV

c) God Works through His People (II): Empowerment

God empowers his people to do his work

Acts 1:8 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] But *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth*. NET

Eph 3:7 [PAUL:] *I became a servant of this gospel according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the exercise of his power.* NET

> It is more apparent in the Greek that the role of God's power in Paul's ministry was an ongoing one (cf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

God equips his people for the work

Heb 13:20–21 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may the God of peace who by the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, [21]*equip you with every good thing to do his will*, working in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen. NET

Eph 4:11–12 *It was he* [Jesus Christ] *who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* [12]*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, …* NET

> God's people are given spiritual gifts for various ministries, preparing them for the work of building up the body of Christ.

God strengthens his people for the work

Jer 1:17–18a [GOD:] Jeremiah, get ready! Go and tell the people what I command you to say. Don't be frightened by them, or I will make you terrified while they watch. [18]*My power will make you strong like a fortress or a column of iron or a wall of bronze.* CEV

2Tim 4:17 [PAUL:] But *the Lord* [Christ] *stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed for all the Gentiles to hear.* And so I was delivered from the lion's mouth! NET

God helps and empowers them to do his work even if they feel inadequate . . .

Jer 1:6–10 [JEREMIAH:] I answered, *"Oh, Lord GOD, I really do not know how to speak well enough for that, for I am too young."* [7]The LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' But *go to whomever I send you and say whatever I tell you.* [8]*Do not be afraid of those to whom I send you, for I will be with you to protect you," says the LORD.* [9]*Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I will most*

assuredly give you the words you are to speak for me. [10]*Know for certain that I hereby give you the authority to announce to nations and kingdoms that they will be uprooted and torn down, destroyed and demolished, rebuilt and firmly planted."* NET

To signify that he had given (or would give) Jeremiah his words to speak – and as part of his appointing and empowering of Jeremiah – God touched Jeremiah's mouth (v. 9). This may have occurred in a vision; some think it actually took place.

. . . Jesus Christ's power works through his people in their weaknesses

2Cor 12:7b–10 [PAUL:] Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me – so that I would not become arrogant. [8]I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. [9]But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for *my power is made perfect in weakness." So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.* [10]*Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.* NET

Having weaknesses and acknowledging them, makes us more open to Jesus Christ's power working through us.

God's power for his people is great

Acts 4:33 *With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, and great grace was on them all. NET

Eph 1:19–20 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You will also know the unlimited greatness of his power as it works with might and strength for us, the believers.* [20]*He worked with that same power in Christ when he brought him back to life and gave him the highest position in heaven.* GW

Note: The empowerment to perform miracles

Acts 19:11–12 *God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul's hands,* [12]*so that when even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his body were brought to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.* NET

1Cor 12:28 God has appointed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then *those who perform miracles, those who have gifts of healing*, those who help others, administrators, and various kinds of tongues. ISV

d) God Guides His People

See also:

- *T*, p. 185
- *T*, p. 186
- *d) Being Guided by God*, p. 307

The Bible speaks of God guiding his people in fulfilling his plans and purposes for them. More specifically, it tells of God guiding them in: living righteous lives; doing his work; and making choices in other matters.

God guides his people . . .

Ps 73:24 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You guide me with your counsel*, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ESV

. . . God leads his people

Ps 23:2–3 [DAVID:] He makes me lie down in green pastures. *He leads me beside still waters.* [3]He restores my soul. *He leads me in paths of righteousness* for his name's sake. ESV

Isa 48:17 This is what the Lord, who saves you, the Holy One of Israel, says: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to do what is good, *who leads you in the way you should go*. NCV™

God guides his people always

Ps 48:14b *He will guide us forever.* ESV

Isa 58:11a *The LORD will continually lead you*; he will feed you even in parched regions. NET

God guides his people in difficult circumstances

Deut 8:15a [Moses, to the Israelites:] *He led you through that vast and terrifying desert where there were poisonous snakes and scorpions.* GNT

Ps 142:3a [David:] *When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.* GNT

The second clause suggests that God not only knows but also guides in what one should do.

God commands and directs them in doing his work

Acts 7:44 The Holy Tent where God spoke to our ancestors was with them in the desert. *God told Moses how to make this Tent, and he made it like the plan God showed him.* NCV™

Acts 10:33 [Cornelius, to Peter:] Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to *everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.* NET

Examples of God giving guidance through visions

Acts 16:9–10 *A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" [10]After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.* NET

Acts 18:9–11 *The Lord said to Paul by a vision in the night, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, [10]because I am with you, and no one will assault you to harm you, because I have many people in this city." [11]So he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. God's Plans for Israel

Large portions of the writings of the OT prophets speak of a wonderful, future renewal of Israel by God. There are differences of opinion as to what degree these are literal and physical, as opposed to figurative or spiritual.

If they are largely meant to be understood literally, then they speak of the actual Israel and Jerusalem (or Zion), most likely immediately preceding and during the thousand years or Millennium spoken of in Revelation 20:1–7 (cf. *P*, p. 160). As such the time of a renewed Israel would largely correspond with that of a physical universal rule of Jesus Christ and would precede the final judgment.

If instead the prophecies are basically figurative and spiritual, then they are more likely to be referring to all believers – the "new" Israel (cf. *G*, p. 142). As such they would be portraying God's people and kingdom following Jesus Christ's mission and/or quite possibly anticipating heaven or the new Jerusalem (cf. *N*, p. 162).

In reading the following sections, bear in mind that some prophecies are understood to be progressively fulfilled throughout history, culminating in a final fulfillment at the end of the age. For example a number of the passages refer initially to the Jew's return after the Babylonian exile, but also appear to have a future era in view. Many probably also have an application to the experience of God's people in all periods. As such – and with the hope that they provide for the future – they are a great source of encouragement to all believers.

Note that while the subheadings speak of Israel, many of the verses refer to Jerusalem in particular.

a) Return to the Land

Some commentators see a fulfillment of some of the following prophecies in the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

God will gather the remnant of exiled Israel from the nations and bring them home

Jer 23:3, 7–8 [GOD:] Then *I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold*, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. … [7]"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' [8]but 'As *the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land*." ESV

God will aid them on the journey home . . .

Zec 10:10–12 [GOD:] *I will bring them home from Egypt and Assyria, then let them settle as far as Gilead and Lebanon, until the land overflows with them.* [11]*My people will go through an ocean of troubles, but I will overcome the waves and dry up the deepest part of the Nile. Assyria's great pride will be put down, and the power of Egypt will disappear.* [12]*I'll strengthen my people because of who I am, and they will follow me. I, the Lord, have spoken!* CEV

. . . and the nations also will assist in bringing the exiled Israelites home

Isa 66:20 [GOD:] *They will bring back all your countrymen from all the nations as an offering to the LORD. They will bring them on horses, in chariots, in wagons, on mules, and on camels to my holy hill Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the Israelites bring offerings to the LORD's temple in ritually pure containers.* NET

This appears to be speaking of people of other nations bringing the exiled Israelites home.

The people of Israel will possess the land – forever

Isa 60:21a [GOD, TO JERUSALEM:] All of your people will be godly; *they will possess the land permanently*. NET

Judah and Israel will be reunited

Hos 1:11a *Then the people of Judah and the people of Israel will be gathered together. They will appoint for themselves one leader*, and will flourish in the land. NET

b) Physical Renewal

Israel will be physically restored

Ezek 36:35–36 *They* [people] *will say, "This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; the ruined, desolate, and destroyed cities are now fortified and inhabited."* [36]Then the nations which remain around you will know that *I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted what was desolate*. I, the LORD, have spoken – and *I will do it!* NET

The land will be fruitful

Isa 30:23 *The Lord will send rain to water the seeds you have planted—your fields will produce more crops than you need, and your cattle will graze in open pastures.* CEV

Israel's population and area will be increased

Isa 26:15 *Our nation has grown because of you, our LORD. We have more land than before*, and you are honored.. CEV

Joy will accompany God's renewal of Israel . . .

Isa 51:3 Certainly the LORD will console Zion; he will console all her ruins. *He will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the Garden of the Lord. Happiness and joy will be restored to her, thanksgiving and the sound of music.* NET

. . . Israel's sorrow will be no more

Isa 65:19 [GOD:] Jerusalem will bring me joy, and my people will bring me happiness. *The sound of weeping or cries of sorrow will never be heard in her again.* NET

c) Deliverance and Everlasting Peace

God will save Israel

Isa 45:17 *Israel will be delivered once and for all by the LORD; you will never again be ashamed or humiliated.* NET

God will take vengeance on those who persecute Israel

Isa 35:4 Tell those [in Israel or Jerusalem] who panic, "Be strong! Do not fear! *Look, your God comes to avenge! With divine retribution he comes to deliver you."* NET

Siege and deliverance of Jerusalem – with judgment on its attackers

Rev 20:7–9 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison. [8]Then he will go out to trick the nations in all the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. There are so many people they will be like sand on the seashore. [9]*And Satan's army marched across the earth and gathered around the camp of God's people and the city God loves. But fire came down from heaven and burned them up.* NCV™

> Two of the most prominent interpretations of "the camp of God's people and the city God loves" are: a spiritually renewed Jerusalem; and God's people in general. Note that there are a number of OT passages that similarly speak of a future siege and deliverance of Jerusalem, followed by judgment on its attackers (cf. Isa 29:1–8; Zec 12:2–9; Zec 14:1–14).

Israel will defeat its enemies

Isa 11:14 *They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia in the west. Together they will loot the people of the east. They will conquer Edom and Moab. The people of Ammon will be subject to them.* GW

Israel will greatly rejoice in God's salvation

Isa 61:10a *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; I will be overjoyed because of my God. For he clothes me in garments of deliverance; he puts on me a robe symbolizing vindication.* NET

The speaker is probably Jerusalem or Zion personified.

God will protect and care for Israel

Isa 27:3 *I, the LORD, protect it* [Israel]; *I water it regularly. I guard it night and day, so no one can harm it.* NET

Zeph 2:7 The coast will belong to the faithful few from the nation of Judah. There they will graze their sheep. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon. *The LORD their God will take care of them* and will restore their fortunes. GW

The Messiah will rule forever over Israel, in righteousness and peace

Isa 9:7 *Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.* The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. ESV

Israel will have peace – and no fear – forever

Isa 32:17–18 [GOD:] *Fairness will produce peace and result in lasting security.* [18]*My people will live in peaceful settlements, in secure homes, and in safe, quiet places.* NET

Zeph 3:15b The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; *you shall never again fear evil.* ESV

d) Spiritual Renewal

God will cleanse Israel of all impurities and sin . . .

Ezek 36:25, 33 [GOD, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] *I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols.* … [33]"'This is what the sovereign LORD says: *In the day I cleanse you from all your sins*, I will populate the cities and the ruins will be rebuilt. NET

. . . and God will forgive the people's sins

Jer 50:20 The LORD says, *"At that time people will try to find Israel's guilt, but there will be no guilt. People will try to find Judah's sins, but no sins will be found, because* I will leave a few people alive from Israel and Judah, and *I will forgive their sins.* NCV™

Israel will be holy

Ezek 37:28 [GOD:] When my Temple is among them forever, *the nations will know that I, the LORD, make Israel holy.* NCV™

Israel will be righteous

Isa 60:21 *Then all your people will be righteous*, and they will possess the land permanently. GW

The people of Israel will be given God's Spirit

Ezek 39:29 I will no longer hide my face from them, *when I pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD.* NET

The people of Israel will be given spiritual understanding

Isa 29:18, 24 *When that day comes, the deaf will hear the words written in the book. The blind will see out of their gloom and darkness.* … [24]*Then those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding, and those who complain will accept instruction.* GW

Verse 18 appears to be speaking primarily of those who had been spiritually deaf and blind.

e) A Renewed Relationship with God

Israel will turn to God

Hos 3:5 After this, *the people of Israel will return to the LORD their God and follow him and the king from David's family. In the last days they will turn in fear to the LORD*, and he will bless them. NCV™

Israel will worship God – and trust in him

Isa 27:13 At that time a large trumpet will be blown, and the ones lost in the land of Assyria will come, as well as the refugees in the land of Egypt. *They will worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.* NET

Isa 12:1–2 *At that time you* [the people of Israel] *will say: "I praise you, O LORD, for* even though you were angry with me, your anger subsided, and *you consoled me.* [2]*Look, God is my deliverer! I will trust in him and not fear. For the LORD gives me strength and protects me; he has become my deliverer."* NET

Israel will be devoted to God

Jer 50:5b *They will come and bind themselves to the LORD in a lasting covenant that will never be forgotten.* NET

Ezek 20:40a For there on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD, *all the house of Israel will serve me*, all of them in the land. NET

> These verses demonstrate Israel's devotion to God, in speaking of the people: having an unwavering commitment to live in accordance with God's will (cf. Jer 50:5b); and serving God (cf. Ezek 20:40a).

God will be as a husband to Israel, renewing his relationship with her

Hos 2:16, 19–20 "It will come about at that time," declares the LORD, *"you will address me as 'My husband,' and you will no longer call me 'My master'. ...* [19]*"I will make you my wife forever. I will make you my wife in righteousness, in justice, in gracious love, and in mercy.* [20]*I will make you my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD.* ISV

The people of Israel will be God's people and he will be their God

Jer 30:22 [GOD:] *Then you will again be my people and I will be your God.* NET

> This denotes the consummate fulfillment of a key aspect of the first covenant which God made with Israel – that he would be their God and they would be his people.

God will dwell in Jerusalem, living among his people forever

Zec 8:3a *The LORD says, 'I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem.* NET

Ezek 48:35b *The name of the city from that day forward will be: 'The LORD Is There.'* NET

f) Exaltation and Glorification

> Israel will be exalted among the nations because of what God will do for her. In fact God will glorify Israel.

Israel will be dominant among the nations, who will serve it

Isa 14:2 Nations will take them [people of Israel] and bring them back to their own place. *Then the family of Jacob* [Israel] *will make foreigners their servants as they settle in the LORD's land. They will make their captors captives and rule over the ones who oppressed them.* NET

The nations will come to Jerusalem to worship God . . .

Ps 102:21–22 And so his name will be proclaimed in Zion, and *he will be praised in Jerusalem* [22]*when nations and kingdoms come together and worship the LORD.* GNT

. . . and nations will be established with Israel as God's people

Isa 14:1 The LORD will show mercy to the people of Jacob, and he will again choose the people of Israel. He will settle them in their own land. *Then non-Israelite people will join the Israelites and will become a part of the family of Jacob.* NCV™

Zec 2:11a [GOD:] *Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on the day of salvation, and they will also be my people.* NET

God himself will exceedingly bless Israel

Jer 32:40–42 [GOD:] *I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them.* And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from

me. [41]*I will rejoice in doing them good*, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. [42]"For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so *I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them.* ESV

God will glorify Israel

Isa 62:2–3 *Jerusalem, the nations will see your goodness, and all kings will see your glory.* Then you will have a new name, which the LORD himself will give you. [3]*You will be like a beautiful crown in the LORD's hand, like a king's crown in your God's hand.* NCV™

Note that the "new name" (v. 2) appears to refer to one or more of the new names Zion is called later in vv. 4, 12 – which speak of God's new relationship with her in terms alluding to marriage.

Israel's glory will primarily be God, with the glory of his presence

Isa 60:2, 19 Darkness now covers the earth; deep darkness covers her people. But *the LORD shines on you* [Jerusalem], *and people see his glory around you*. ... [19] The sun will no longer be your light during the day nor will the brightness from the moon be your light, because *the LORD will be your light forever, and your God will be your glory.* NCV™

Israel's renewal will bring God glory

Jer 33:9 [GOD:] *All the nations will hear about all the good things which I will do to them. This city* [Jerusalem] *will bring me fame, honor, and praise before them for the joy that I bring it. The nations will tremble in awe at all the peace and prosperity that I will provide for it.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

Section II.

What to Do



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CHAPTER 21

Being Right with God

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I. Getting Right with God

See also:

- *a) Baptism*, p. 316
- *a) Confession of Jesus Christ*, p. 319

The Bible does not simply repeat one basic formula as to how to get "right with God". However there are two prominent themes, which basically encompass the other things that the Bible mentions. These two fundamental themes are repentance and belief in Jesus Christ.

Bear in mind that in using the expression "right with God", this chapter largely has in view being deemed righteous in God's eyes, which involves the forgiveness of one's sins. As such, it also means that we are at peace with God.

a) God's Invitation

God invites all people to come to him and be saved . . .

Isa 45:22 [God:] *Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!* For I am God, and there is no other. ESV

. . . For God wants all people to be saved

1Tim 2:3–4 This is good and it pleases *God our Saviour,* [4]*who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth.* GNT

God wants us to earnestly seek him – and so find him

Acts 17:26–27 [Paul, preaching to the Athenians:] God began by making one person, and from him came all the different people who live everywhere in the world. God decided exactly when and where they must live. [27]*God wanted them to look for him and perhaps search all around for him and find him,* though he is not far from any of us: … NCV™

Deut 4:29 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *If from there you will seek the Lord your God, then you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and soul.* ISV

The reference is actually to God's people seeking him again after being unfaithful, but it is also applicable to people initially seeking him.

We must believe in God and what he says

Heb 11:6 Now *without faith it is impossible to please him, for the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* NET

John 5:24 [Jesus:] I tell you the solemn truth, *the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me* has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life. NET

Jesus' words were from God, who sent him. It is critical that we believe God's words.

We must be open to believing and responding to God

Matt 18:2–4 He [Jesus] called a child, had him stand among them, [3]and said [to his disciples], "I tell you the truth, *unless you turn around and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven!* [4]*Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* NET

Similarly in Mark 10:15 Jesus says, "…whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." These verses refer to the humility, openness and receptiveness of little children. These characteristics are required to believe and respond to Jesus' message – and so enter God's kingdom.

Now is the time to seek God and to respond to him

Isa 55:6 *Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near.* GW

2Cor 6:2 [Paul:] *God says, "At the right time I heard your prayers. On the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you that the "right time" is now, and the "day of salvation" is now.* NCV™

To underline the urgent need to respond to God's salvation – or to secure it (cf. v. 1) – Paul cites Isaiah 49:8, applying it to the present time.

b) Repentance

The words in the Bible that are translated as "repent" speak of: changing one's mind, regret and consequently turning around. When people are called to repent, they are called to change their mindset and turn away from sin to God.

We must repent

Acts 17:30 Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, *he now commands all people everywhere to repent*, ... NET

Confess your sins . . .

1Jn 1:9 But if *we confess our sins*, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. NET

. . . and turn from sinful ways

John 8:11 She [a woman caught committing adultery] replied, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, and *from now on do not sin any more*." NET

In turning from sin, do what is right . . .

Ps 34:14 *Turn away from evil and do what is right!* Strive for peace and promote it! NET

. . . and turn to God

Acts 20:21 [PAUL:] To Jews and Gentiles alike I gave solemn warning that they should *turn from their sins to God* and believe in our Lord Jesus. GNT

Repentance is required for the forgiveness of sins

Acts 3:19 Therefore *repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out*, ... NET

Repentance leads to life

Acts 11:18b "So then, God has granted the *repentance that leads to life* even to the Gentiles." NET

Not repenting will result in judgment

Rom 2:5 [PAUL, TO ANY UNREPENTANT READERS:] But *because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed!* NET

c) Belief in Jesus Christ (I): General

See also:

- *a) Confession of Jesus Christ*, p. 319

Believe in Jesus Christ

John 6:29 Jesus replied, "This is the deed God requires – to *believe in the one whom he sent*." NET

Believing in Jesus Christ involves believing what the Bible says about: who he is; what he taught and did; his death and resurrection; and the results of his death and resurrection. Regarding the results of his death and resurrection, we are to believe that as a result of his death and resurrection Jesus Christ provides the things discussed below in *Belief in Jesus Christ (III): Outcomes*.

Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God

See also:

- *11. God's Promised Messiah*, p. 113

John 11:27b [MARTHA, TO JESUS:] Martha said to him, "Yes, Lord, *I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who was expected to come into the world*." GW

"Christ" and "Messiah" are Greek and Hebrew terms respectively, meaning the "anointed" or the "Anointed One". The OT tells of a coming anointed one of God, and on occasions speaks of him as God's Son (cf. 2Sam 7:11b–14a; Ps 2:6–7; Ps 89:27).

Further key things to know and believe about Jesus Christ

John 4:42 They said to the woman, "No longer do we believe because of your words, for we have heard for ourselves, and *we know that this one really is the Savior of the world*." NET

Rom 10:9 If you *declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead*, you will be saved. NCV™

The confession "Jesus is Lord" indicates that one believes Jesus is Lord over all creation.

One's response to Jesus Christ is one's response to God, who sent him

John 13:20 I tell you the solemn truth, whoever accepts the one I send accepts me, and *whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me*. NET

Luke 10:16 "The one who listens to you listens to me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and *the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me*." NET

Superficial belief is not enough . . .

Luke 8:13 [JESUS, EXPLAINING THE MEANING OF A PARABLE:] Those on the rock are the *ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in a time of testing fall away.* NET

Such belief is superficial rather than deep-rooted. It is not entrenched in one's thoughts, persistently influencing one's behaviour. Moreover, it does not last.

. . . We are to both believe and repent

Acts 20:21 To Jews and Gentiles alike *I gave solemn warning that they should turn from their sins to God and believe in our Lord Jesus*. GNT

d) Belief in Jesus Christ (II): Reasons to Believe

Jesus Christ's words and knowledge

John 4:41 And *many more believed because of the things he said*. NCV™

John 16:30 *Now we know that you know everything and do not need anyone to ask you anything. Because of this we believe that you have come from God.* NET

The clause "do not need anyone to question you" may be meaning that Jesus had the capacity to answer a person's question even before it was asked (cf. NCV).

Jesus Christ's deeds

John 2:23 Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, *many people believed in his name because they saw the miraculous signs he was doing*. NET

Jesus Christ's death and resurrection

Matt 27:50–52, 54 *Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.* [51]*Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split apart.* [52]*And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised. ...* [54]*Now when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were extremely terrified and said, "Truly this one was God's Son!"* NET

John 13:19 [JESUS:] *I am telling you this now, before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I am he.* NET

It appears that "before it happens" refers to Jesus' death – with the preceding events, including his betrayal (cf. v. 18) – and to his subsequent resurrection. In addition to the importance of his death and resurrection themselves in showing who Jesus was, the fact that he predicted them also proved his claims. The phrase "I am he" is probably meaning that he is the Messiah, the one for whom the Jews were waiting.

Testimonies about Jesus Christ . . .

John 4:39 *Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the report of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I ever did."* NET

. . . God himself testified to Jesus and his claims

Matt 3:16–17 After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, *the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him.* [17]*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight."* NET

As well as God's voice (v. 17), the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus "like a dove" (Luke 3:22) was

effectively a testimony from God, being apparent not only to Jesus but also to John (cf. John 1:32) and so presumably also to others present.

e) Belief in Jesus Christ (III): Outcomes

Note that in conjunction with the following things being outcomes of believing in Jesus Christ, we are to believe in Jesus Christ for these things being granted to us, believing that he has made them possible by what he did.

We are forgiven of our sins

Acts 10:43 About him [Jesus] all the prophets testify, that *everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*. NET

We are to believe in Jesus Christ for God's forgiveness of our sins. As such we are to believe Jesus Christ to be (with what he has accomplished) the means of forgiveness – and trust in him for the forgiveness of our own sins.

We are granted righteousness and justified before God

Rom 3:21–22a But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22]*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*. ESV

Rom 10:10 For *with the heart one believes and is justified*, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ESV

We are saved

Acts 16:30b–31 [A JAILER, TO PAUL AND SILAS:] "Sirs, *what must I do to be saved?*" [31]*They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved*, you and your household." NET

Rom 10:9 *If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved*. GNT

We have eternal life

John 3:16 For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that *everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life*. NET

We become a child of God

John 1:12–13 But *to all who did accept him* [Jesus] *and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God*. [13]They did not become his children in any human way—by any human parents or human desire. *They were born of God.* NCV™

When we are "born of God" we are made alive spiritually, and begin a process of growing into God's likeness.

We are given God's Holy Spirit

John 7:38–39 [JESUS:] *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* [39]*Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive*, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. ESV

Note: Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are condemned and do not have life

John 3:18, 36 The one who believes in him is not condemned. *The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. …* [36]The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. *The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him.* NET

f) Reasons for Assurance

The verses in this section give reasons for assurance of things such as being saved and being in a close relationship with God – and as a consequence give assurance of being made right with God. Reasons for assurance of such things can also be found in the other sections of this chapter (particularly in *Repentance*, p. 227; and *Belief in Jesus Christ (III): Outcomes*, p. 229.) and in a number of parts of other chapters in this book.

God's word

1Jn 5:13 [John:] *I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* NET

John speaks of things he wrote to assure his readers that they had eternal life. His writings are part of God's word, and accepting them – as with other things in God's word – brings great assurance.

Jesus Christ's death and his ministry in his risen life

Heb 10:19–22 [The writer, to believers:] *Therefore, my brothers, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, [20]the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), [21]and since we have a great high priest over the household of God, [22]let us continue to come near with sincere hearts in the full assurance that faith provides, because our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water.* ISV

The "sanctuary" (v. 19) speaks of God's presence. The phrase "our hearts have been sprinkled" (v. 22) alludes to the sprinkling of blood to ceremonially cleanse under the old covenant; in parallel Jesus Christ's blood has in a sense "sprinkled" our hearts to cleanse us. A key aspect of his role as our priest (v. 21) is that "he always lives to intercede" (7:25) for us before God. Being cleansed as such by Christ's death and having him as our priest – coupled with faith about the reality of these things – gives great assurance of being accepted into God's presence.

Having the Holy Spirit

Rom 8:15–16 [Paul, to believers:] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but *you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father." [16]The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children.* NET

1Jn 4:13 *By this we know that we reside in God and he in us: in that he has given us of his Spirit.* NET

Note that we can be confident that God has given the Holy Spirit to us through evidence such as: indications of the "fruits" of the Holy Spirit in our lives (cf. Gal 5:22); having a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit (some of which are more obvious than others); and recognition of the Holy Spirit's help, such as his empowerment or guidance. Moreover, we can sense or have an inner awareness of God, which is constant evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Obeying God

1Jn 2:3–6 *We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands.* [4]Anyone who says, "I know God," but does not obey God's commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. [5]But *if someone obeys God's teaching, then in that person God's love has truly reached its goal. This is how we can be sure we are living in God:* [6]*Whoever says that he lives in God must live as Jesus lived.* NCV™

Loving other Christians

1Jn 3:14, 18–19 [John, to believers:] *We know that we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love our brothers and sisters.* Whoever does not love is still under the power of death. ... [18]My children, *our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.* [19]*This, then, is how we will know that we belong to the truth; this is how we will be confident in God's presence.* GNT

Further reasons

1Jn 1:9 But *if we confess our sins, he* [God] *is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.* NET

John 6:37 [Jesus:] Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me, and *the one who comes to me I will never send away.* NET

Jesus assures us that he will not reject anyone who comes to him.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Staying Right with God

See also:

- *B*, p. 240

As seen in the first half of this chapter, being made right with God involves being forgiven and granted righteousness. Having been made right with God, it is critical that we live in accordance with this standing, so as to stay right with God. The following topics deal with some key aspects involved in staying right with God.

a) The Need to Obey God

See also:

- *I*, p. 255

Obedience does not make us righteous nor earn us salvation. But we need to obey God in keeping with the righteous state before God that is granted to believers through faith in Jesus Christ. Moreover, in striving to obey God and to do his will, we effectively accept or grasp the undeserved salvation made possible by God's grace. (The same points can be made regarding good deeds – an aspect of obeying God – the subject of the following chapter section.)

Obedience accompanies belief

Rom 16:26b And by the command of the eternal God it [the gospel] is made known to all nations *that they might believe and obey.* NCV™

God requires us to both believe and obey him. Thus obedience ought to accompany belief.

Obedience leads to righteousness

Rom 6:16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of *obedience, which leads to righteousness*? ESV

Righteousness involves conformity to the will of God. As such obedience is critical for it. However, as is the case earlier in this chapter, righteousness is also sometimes spoken of in a stricter legal sense – in regard to being deemed as righteous by God. This cannot be achieved just by obedience, simply because it is impossible to obey God's law perfectly so as to be declared completely righteous before him. It is only by faith in Jesus Christ that one can be declared as righteous in this sense.

But bear in mind that obedience goes hand in hand with faith, as shown above in *Obedience accompanies belief*. Faith requires obedience and is shown to be valid by it. No one will be declared righteous on Judgment Day without having endeavoured to be obedient. So Paul can say in Romans 6:16 (above) that obedience "leads to righteousness", a concept applicable to all senses of the word "righteousness".

Obedience leads to holiness

Rom 6:22 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now that you have been freed from sin and have *become God's slaves, the benefit you reap is sanctification*, and the result is eternal life. ISV

Here Paul speaks of becoming slaves in obedience to God, which brings sanctification, a term akin to holiness.

Obedience brings one into a close relationship with God and Jesus Christ . . .

Jer 7:23a [GOD, REFERRING TO THE ISRAELITES:] I also explicitly commanded them: *"Obey me. If you do, I will be your God and you will be my people.* Live exactly the way I tell you and things will go well with you." NET

Mark 3:35 [JESUS:] For *whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.* NET

. . . God and Jesus Christ are with those who obey

John 14:23 Jesus answered him, "Whoever loves me will *obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him.* GNT

Obedience and doing God's will are critical for salvation

Heb 5:9 After he had finished his work, he became the source of *eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him.* GW

Matt 7:21 [JESUS:] *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.* NET

Obedience leads to eternal life

Matt 19:16–17 A man came to Jesus and asked, *"Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal life?"* [17]Jesus said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? Only God is good. *If you want to have eternal life, you must obey his commandments.*" CEV

John 8:51 [JESUS:] I tell you the solemn truth, *if anyone obeys my teaching, he will never see death*. NET

Not obeying God ultimately ends in eternal destruction

2Thes 1:8–10 *With flaming fire he* [Christ] *will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.* [9]*They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength*, [10]when he comes to be glorified among his saints and admired on that day among all who have believed – and you did in fact believe our testimony. NET

b) The Need for Good Deeds

> While good deeds do not make us right with God, they are critical for staying right with God – not least because they accompany things that are indicative of being right with God. As such, good deeds prove that one's faith and Christianity are valid – and consequently they are important for one's salvation.
>
> Note that good deeds are also involved in obeying God, the subject of the previous section.

We are to persistently do good deeds

Titus 3:1, 14 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TITUS WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to *be ready for every good work*, … [14]And *let our people learn to devote themselves to good works*, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. ESV

True faith involves good deeds

James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also *faith without works is dead*. NET

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight – *the only thing that matters is faith working through love*. NET

> Faith is more than just a matter of one's intellect. It involves an active trust in God that is manifested in acts of love, i.e. good deeds.

Good deeds are critical for salvation and eternal life

Heb 6:9–12 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Even though we speak like this, dear friends, *we are convinced of better things in your case, things that point to salvation*. [10]For God is not so unjust as to forget *your work and the love you have shown him as you have ministered to the saints and continue to minister to them.* [11]*But we want each of you to continue to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to give full assurance to your hope.* [12]Then, *instead of being lazy, you will become imitators of those who are inheriting the promises through faith and patience.* ISV

Rom 2:6–7 *He* [God] *will reward each one according to his works:* [7]*eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory and honor and immortality, …* NET

Note: Our good deeds do not earn salvation, for it is by grace

Eph 2:8–9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For *by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God;* [9]*it is not from works, so that no one can boast.* NET

> In v. 9, "works" may be primarily referring to things done in order to obey the law, but even so here it is very much applicable to good works or deeds (cf. v. 10). Any such good "works" do not earn us righteousness and salvation. They are an effect of these things rather than a cause. Rather, salvation comes by God's grace.

c) Living Free of the Law and Sin – by the Spirit

See also:

- *c) Release from the Law through Jesus Christ*, p. 148

Through what Jesus Christ has accomplished, believers have been set free from the Mosaic Law (the law given through Moses) as the means of being made right with God. As such, many aspects of the law are no longer applicable, particularly the regulations regarding making atonement for sin.

This does not mean that we are permitted to sin. For we are still to obey the spiritual and moral commands of the law that remain pertinent to our relationship with God and to our relationships with other people. But rather than being preoccupied with doggedly obeying rules, we are to be focused on living by God's Holy Spirit. In doing so we are better able to avoid sin and more effectively fulfill God's will.

Our freedom from the Mosaic Law does not permit us to sin . . .

Gal 5:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] My brothers and sisters, *God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self.* Serve each other with love. NCV™

Freedom from the Mosaic Law is being referred to here.

. . . In fact, sinning results in enslavement to sin

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, *everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin*. NET

We have been freed from the law to live by the Holy Spirit

Rom 7:6 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now *we have been released from the law, because we have died to what controlled us* [the law], *so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not under the old written code*. NET

Living by the Holy Spirit involves: being both alert to and responsive to the Spirit's promptings; and relying on the Spirit's power, to enable and transform us. Along with this, our minds should be focused on things of the Spirit (as per Romans 8:5 in the following subsection).

Instead of living by the sinful nature, live by the Holy Spirit . . .

Rom 8:3b–5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He [God] condemned sin in the flesh [4]so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who *do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*. [5]For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but *those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit*. ISV

Gal 5:16 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But I say, *live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh*. NET

In the above passages, "flesh" denotes our sinful nature.

. . . and live in God's grace

Acts 13:43 When the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and God–fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking with them and were persuading them to *continue in the grace of God*. NET

After experiencing God's grace in being made right with him and being given salvation (cf. *Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ*, p. 147), Christians are to live in the realm of his grace. This primarily involves being faithful to God and holding to the faith – thus remaining under his grace, staying right with him. It also encompasses trusting in God's grace to meet one's needs, notably spiritual needs.

Living in God's grace is complementary to living by the Holy Spirit. Additionally it contrasts in particular with living by the law.

Note: Inner righteousness and right attitudes are needed, rather than mere compliance with rules

Matt 5:20–22a, 27–28 [JESUS:] For I tell you, *unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* [21]*"You have heard that it was said to an older generation, 'Do not murder,' and 'whoever murders will be subjected to judgment.'* [22]*But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment. ...* [27]*"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'* [28]*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* NET

In v. 20 Jesus refers to the Jewish leaders' lack of true, inner righteousness. They gave the appearance of complying with the law's commandments – and indeed probably did largely comply with its rules and regulations. But their characters were not consistent with the spirit of the law. Jesus may well have had this latter point in view in subsequently speaking of attitudes that should accompany obedience to such commands as those forbidding murder (vv. 21–22a) and adultery (vv. 27–28).

d) Epilogue: Living 'in' Jesus Christ

See also:

- *II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ*, p. 173

Paul often speaks of believers being or acting "in" Christ. This refers to their close relationship and association with Jesus Christ, in which they are even identified with him. (See also the introductory comments under *II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ*, p. 173.)

Believers are to live their lives in accordance with this relationship. As such, in addition to being mindful of the relationship, believers should: be dependent on Jesus Christ in whom they subsist; and act in a way consistent with Jesus Christ and his teachings.

Live "in" Jesus Christ

1Cor 4:17b [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] He [Timothy] will help you remember *my way of life in Christ Jesus*, just as I teach it in all the churches everywhere. NCV™

Remain "in" Jesus Christ

John 15:4–6 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.* [5]*"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me – and I in him – bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing.* [6]*If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; and such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and are burned up.* NET

We live "in" Jesus Christ – and he in us – by faith . . .

Col 2:5–7 [Paul, to the Colossian believers:] For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your morale and *the firmness of your faith in Christ*. [6]Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live your lives in him,* [7]*rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith* just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. NET

Paul appears to associate having a firm faith in Christ (v. 5) – and being established in the faith (v. 7; cf. AMP, NKJV, NRSV) – with living in Christ (v. 6) and being "rooted and built up in him" (v. 7).

. . . and by holding to his teachings

John 15:7, 10 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *If you remain in me and my words remain in you*, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. … [10]*If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love*, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. NET

One remains in Jesus Christ (v. 7) and similarly in his love (v. 10), by holding to his words (v. 7) including his commands (v. 10).

Speak "in" Jesus Christ

Rom 9:1 [Paul:] *I am speaking the truth in Christ* —I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ESV

Being "in" Jesus Christ we should speak and act (as per the following subsection) "in" Jesus Christ, in a manner consistent with this standing. Doing so involves speaking and acting in accordance with Jesus Christ's teachings and faith in him (as reflected by the previous two subsections).

Act towards others "in" Jesus Christ

Eph 6:1 Children, *obey your parents in the Lord* for this is right. NET

Phil 2:29 [Paul, to the Philippian believers:] So *welcome him in the Lord* with all joy, and make sure you honor such people highly. ISV

Do God's work "in" Jesus Christ

Rom 16:12 [Paul, to the Roman believers:] Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, *who have worked hard in the Lord*. Greet my dear friend Persis, *who has worked very hard in the Lord*. ISV

Rejoice “in” Jesus Christ

Phil 3:1a Finally, my brothers and sisters, *rejoice in the Lord!* NET

“In” Jesus Christ, we are to rejoice – “be joyful in your union with the Lord” (GNT).

Further aspects of living “in” Jesus Christ

1Thes 5:16–18 *Be joyful always,* [17]*pray at all times,* [18]*be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus.* GNT

Eph 6:10 Finally, *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. ESV

Believers are to be spiritually strong “in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power” (GNT; cf. AMP).

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 22

Having Faith in God

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I. Faith and Hope

Faith in God is absolutely fundamental to the Christian life. We in fact need to continually live by faith, doing so in all areas of our lives. Hope is also vital for Christians. It is necessary for such things as sustaining and strengthening us – particularly in sustaining our faith.

a) Have Faith in God

See also:

- *a) Righteousness Not by Law, but Faith in Jesus Christ*, p. 146
- *c) Belief in Jesus Christ (I): General*, p. 227
- *d) Belief in Jesus Christ (II): Reasons to Believe*, p. 228
- *e) Belief in Jesus Christ (III): Outcomes*, p. 229
- *b) Have Faith in God and Pray*, p. 438

Have faith in God and Jesus Christ

Mark 11:22b [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Have faith in God.* NET

Eph 1:15–16 [Paul, to the Ephesian believers:] For this reason, because I have heard of *your faith in the Lord Jesus* and your love for all the saints, [16]I do not cease to give thanks for you when I remember you in my prayers. NET

Live by faith

2Cor 5:7 [Paul, to believers:] For *we live by faith, not by sight.* ISV

God's people are to live by faith, persistently having faith in God and the realization of his promises.

Grow in faith

2Thes 1:3 [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] We must always thank God for you, brothers and sisters. This is only right, because *your faith is growing more and more,* and the love that every one of you has for each other is increasing. NCV™

Have strong faith . . .

2Cor 8:7 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] But as you *excel in everything – in faith,* in speech, in knowledge, and in all eagerness and in the love from us that is in you – make sure that you excel in this act of kindness too. NET

Acts 6:5a The proposal pleased the entire group [of believers], so they chose Stephen, *a man full of faith* and of the Holy Spirit ... NET

. . . For faith is tested

James 1:3 [James, to believers:] You know that such *testing of your faith* produces endurance. GW

Persist in faith

Col 1:23a [Paul, to believers:] This is on the condition that you *continue in faith* without being moved from the solid foundation of the hope that the Good News contains. GW

Reasons to trust (and so have faith) in God: God's unfailing love; . . .

Ps 52:8b [David:] *I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.* ESV

Ps 13:5 [David, to God:] *I rely on your constant love;* I will be glad, because you will rescue me. GNT

. . . God's power; . . .

Ex 14:31 *When the Israelites saw the great power the Lord had used against the Egyptians, they feared the Lord, and they trusted him* and his servant Moses. NCV™

. . . and God's past deliverance

2Tim 4:17–18 [Paul:] But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed for all the Gentiles to hear. And so *I was delivered from the lion's mouth! [18]The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.* To him be glory for ever and ever! Amen. NET

The Lord (probably a reference to Jesus Christ) had earlier delivered Paul (v. 17), giving Paul reason to

continue to trust or have faith that the Lord would take care of him (v. 18).

b) What Faith in God Involves Doing

This section discusses what having faith in God (and Jesus Christ) involves doing. Generally speaking, it involves believing and trusting God. More specifically, it involves believing and trusting that God will: fulfill his promises; care for us; and respond to our requests.

To have faith in God: believe in him (and what he says); . . .

1Pet 1:21 [Peter, to believers:] Through Christ *you believe in God,* who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. *So your faith and your hope are in God.* NCV™

This verse links belief with faith. As such it reflects that having faith in God involves believing in him. Such belief includes believing what he says, as is perhaps suggested here.

. . . and trust in God

Prov 3:5 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.* NET

Ps 62:8a *Trust in him at all times, you people!* NET

Trusting in God is an integral part of having faith in God. Having faith in God can be defined as believing and trusting God. For we are to believe in God and what he says, and also confidently trust in him and what he says in regard to our own lives. One could say having faith means that: in our minds we are to believe and in our hearts we are to trust.

Have faith that God will fulfill what he promises

Acts 27:23–25 [Paul, to men sailing on a ship with him in a bad storm:] For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve came to me [24]and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.' [25]Therefore keep up your courage, men, for *I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told.* NET

2Pet 3:13 [Peter, to believers:] But *in keeping with his* [God's] *promise, we are looking forward to new heavens and a new earth,* where righteousness is at home. ISV

In "looking forward" to the fulfillment of God's promises one demonstrates faith in them being fulfilled. Note that God's promises include promises regarding the afterlife (in view here), promises to take care of us (cf. Acts 27:23–25) and promises to answer prayer. The latter two are reflected in the next two subsections.

Have faith that God will care for you

Isa 50:10 All of you that honor the Lord and obey the words of his servant, *the path you walk may be dark indeed, but trust in the Lord, rely on your God.* GNT

Heb 11:32–34 And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. [33]*Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, received promises, shut the mouths of lions,* [34]*put out raging fires, escaped death by the sword, found strength in weakness, became powerful in battle, and routed foreign armies.* ISV

Various people of God are shown here to have had faith that God would take care of them amidst the threat of things such as powerful rulers and their forces, wild beasts, fire and the sword – most of which carried the threat of imminent death.

Have faith that God will do what you ask

Ps 5:3 [David:] *Lord, in the morning you will hear me; in the morning I will present my case to you and then wait expectantly for an answer.* NET

Matt 9:27–30a As Jesus went on from there, *two blind men followed him, shouting, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"* [28]When he went into the house, the blind men came to him. *Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord."* [29]*Then he touched their eyes saying, "Let it be done for you according to your faith."* [30]*And their eyes were opened.* NET

Note: Faith involves believing in what we do not see

Heb 11:1 Now *faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.* NET

c) The Importance of Faith (I): Godly Living

By faith we stand firm

2Cor 1:24 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] I do not mean that we rule over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because *by faith you stand firm*. NET

Faith produces obedience to God

Heb 11:8 *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, and he went out without understanding where he was going.* NET

Faith produces work in service to God

1Thes 1:3a [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] We continually recall before God our Father *the things you have done because of your faith* and the work you have done because of your love. NCV™

Faith is vital to prayer, for God to grant requests

Matt 21:22 *If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.* GNT

1Chr 5:20 They [Israelite soldiers] received divine help in fighting them, and the Hagrites and all their allies were handed over to them. They cried out to God during the battle; *he responded to their prayers because they trusted in him*. NET

If we have faith nothing will be impossible

Matt 17:19–20 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why couldn't we cast it [a demon] out?" [20]He told them, "It was because of your little faith. I tell you the truth, *if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you.*" NET

> The "mountain" signifies a seemingly insurmountable difficulty, here presumably alluding to difficulties encountered in advancing God's kingdom. Jesus is emphasizing genuine or quality faith, rather than amount of faith. If we have such faith nothing will be impossible, both in our service of God and in confronting issues in our lives. As such we are to have faith (and pray) that what we understand to be in accordance with God's will, will take place.

d) The Importance of Faith (II): Blessings

> Note that the topics in the previous section should also be viewed as blessings that come through faith.

By faith we remain in a right relationship with God and Jesus Christ

Col 1:22–23a [Paul, to believers:] But his Son became a human and died. So *God made peace with you, and now he lets you stand in his presence as people who are holy and faultless and innocent.* [23]*But you must stay deeply rooted and firm in your faith.* CEV

Eph 3:16–17a [Paul, to believers:] I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, [17]*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith* … NET

By faith we receive what God has promised . . .

Heb 6:12 [The writer, to believers:] We do not want you to become lazy. Be like those who *through faith and patience will receive what God has promised*. NCV™

. . . By faith we will receive the promises and salvation of the afterlife

Heb 10:35–39 [The writer, to believers:] So *do not throw away your confidence, since it holds a great reward for you.* [36]*For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will you can receive what he has promised.* [37]For "in a very little while the one who is coming will return and will not delay; [38]but *my righteous one will live by faith*, and if he turns back, my soul will take no pleasure in him." [39]*Now, we do not belong to those who turn back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.* ISV

> "You need endurance" (v. 36a) in the context may well have persevering in faith in view (vv. 35, 38–39) as much as persevering in doing God's will (the

two are very closely associated anyway). The result of such perseverance is that we will receive what God has promised (v. 36b; cf. vv. 35, 39). In vv. 38–39 Paul further stresses the importance of continuing to live by faith, finishing by emphasizing that it is those who have faith who are and/or will be saved.

By faith our needs are met

Acts 3:16 [PETER, SPEAKING TO A CROWD ABOUT THE HEALING OF A FORMER CRIPPLE:] You see this man, and you know him. *He put his faith in the name of Jesus and was made strong. Faith in Jesus made this man completely well* while everyone was watching. CEV

2Chr 20:20, 22 Jehoshaphat's army went out into the Desert of Tekoa early in the morning. As they were starting out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, people of Judah and Jerusalem. *Have faith in the LORD your God, and you will stand strong. Have faith in his prophets, and you will succeed.*" ... [22]As they began to sing and praise God, *the LORD set ambushes for the people of Ammon, Moab, and Edom who had come to attack Judah. And they were defeated.* NCV™

Jehoshaphat and his army were facing the daunting task of repelling a much larger invading army. As such they were in great need.

Trusting in God brings joy and peace

Rom 15:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him*, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. NET

Ps 33:21 For *our hearts rejoice in him, for we trust in his holy name*. NET

Isa 26:3 [A SONG TO GOD:] *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.* ESV

e) Have Hope in God

Hope for a believer involves an assurance of their future, based on the truth of God's promises – rather than merely being an unfounded optimism.

Put your hope in God and Jesus Christ

Ps 131:3 O Israel, *hope in the LORD now and forevermore!* NET

Eph 1:12 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS:] Let us, then, who were the first to *hope in Christ*, praise God's glory! GNT

Put your hope in God's promises

Ps 119:114, 147 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] You are my defender and protector; *I put my hope in your promise*. ... [147]Before sunrise I call to you for help; *I place my hope in your promise.* GNT

Set your hope on God's timely care

2Cor 1:10 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF GOD:] He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. *On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.* ESV

1Tim 6:17 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Command those who are rich in the things of this life not to be proud, but *to place their hope, not in such an uncertain thing as riches, but in God, who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment*. GNT

Set your hope on Jesus Christ's return and what will follow

Titus 2:13 [PAUL:] At the same time we can expect *what we hope for – the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*. GW

1Pet 1:13 Therefore, get your minds ready for action by being fully sober, and *set your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed*. NET

Reasons to have hope in God: God's love and faithfulness; . . .

Lam 3:21–23 [Jeremiah:] But *this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:* [22]*The steadfast love of the* Lord *never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* [23]*they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* ESV

. . . and the deeds of God, our Savior

Jer 14:8a, 22 [Jeremiah, to God:] *You are Israel's only hope; you are the one who saves us from disaster.* ... [22]None of the idols of the nations can send rain; the sky by itself cannot make showers fall. *We have put our hope in you, O* Lord *our God, because you are the one who does these things.* GNT

God's deeds in saving us (v. 8a) and providing for us (v. 22), give reason to place our hope in him.

Other godly sources of hope

Rom 15:4 [Paul, to believers:] For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, *that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* ESV

Philem 1:22 [Paul, to Philemon:] At the same time also, prepare a place for me to stay, for *I hope that through your prayers I will be given back to you.* NET

Prayer encourages hope in God.

f) The Importance of Hope

Hope is vital for faith

Col 1:5 [Paul, to the Colossian believers:] *Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven,* which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel ... NET

Heb 11:1 Now *faith is being sure of what we hope for,* being convinced of what we do not see. NET

The hope Christians have is not a groundless longing, but a confident assurance. Such hope stimulates and supports ongoing faith (cf. Col 1:5), which has as its focus that for which believers hope (cf. Heb 11:1).

Hope helps us remain firm

Heb 6:19a [The writer, to believers:] *We have this hope as an anchor for our souls, firm and secure* ... ISV

The reference is to the hope that comes from God's promise to Abraham (cf. vv. 13–18) as applied to all God's people in regard to their salvation.

Further ways hope is important for living the Christian life

Rom 12:12 *Be joyful in hope,* patient in trouble, and persistent in prayer. ISV

2Cor 3:12 [Paul:] *Since we have such a hope, we are very bold,* ... ESV

1Jn 3:2–3 [John, to believers:] Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that whenever it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is. [3]And *everyone who has this hope focused on him purifies himself, just as Jesus is pure*). NET

Note: The depressing plight of a lack of hope

Job 7:6 *My days go by faster than a weaver's tool, and they come to an end without hope.* NCV™

1Thes 4:13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, *about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope.* NET

Unbelievers without hope can only grieve over death – both over the deaths of loved ones (primarily in view here) and their own certain deaths. Believers still grieve over the deaths of loved ones, but it is not a grief devoid of hope.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. What Not to Do

To live a life of faith, we should ensure that we do not lack faith in God. As such we need to avoid things which hinder faith in God. Notably we should avoid doubt, fear, worry and trusting in other things. Some verses which encourage believers not to be afraid and not to worry are amongst the best-loved verses in the Bible.

a) Do Not Lack Faith

Do not be lacking in faith . . .

Mark 4:37–40 Now a great windstorm developed and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was nearly swamped. [38]But he [Jesus] was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They [his disciples] woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" [39]So he got up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Be quiet! Calm down!" Then the wind stopped, and it was dead calm. [40]And he said to them, *"Why are you cowardly? Do you still not have faith?"* NET

. . . Do not doubt

Matt 14:31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him [Peter], saying to him, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"* NET

James 1:6 [JAMES, SPEAKING OF ONE ASKING GOD FOR SOMETHING:] But *he must ask in faith without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind*. NET

The "wave" imagery depicts weak, unstable faith – wavering between belief of sorts (as shown in asking) and unbelief (as shown in doubting).

Do not test or question God

Ps 78:18–22 *They* [the Israelites] *tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved.* [19]*They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?* [20]He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. *Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?"* [21]*Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of wrath; a fire was kindled against Jacob; his anger rose against Israel,* [22]*because they did not believe in God and did not trust his saving power.* ESV

We should not speak against God, doubting and questioning such things as his wisdom, his power and his commitment to us. In doing so we in a sense "test" God (v. 18) and display a lack of belief and trust (i.e. faith) in him (v. 22).

Lack of faith is associated with not obeying God

Deut 9:23 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] And when he sent you from Kadesh–Barnea and told you, "Go up and possess the land I have given you," *you rebelled against the LORD your God and would neither believe nor obey him*. NET

Ps 106:24–25 They [the Israelites] rejected the fruitful land; *they did not believe his promise*. [25]They grumbled in their tents; *they did not obey the LORD*. NET

Lack of faith can have other detrimental effects

Matt 17:19–20a Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, *"Why could we not cast it* [a demon] *out?"* [20]*He said to them, "Because of your little faith.* ESV

Isa 7:9 [GOD, TO AHAZ:] Ephraim's leader is Samaria, and Samaria's leader is the son of Remaliah. *If your faith does not remain firm, then you will not remain secure.* NET

Here God warns Ahaz, the king of Judah, that if he did not firmly have faith in God's promises (cf. vv. 7–8) regarding a threatened invasion (cf. vv. 5–6) failing to eventuate, he would "not last" (NASB; cf. AMP, CEV, NCV, NKJV).

Lack of faith can even bring God's punishment

Jude 1:5 Don't forget what happened to those people that the Lord rescued from Egypt. *Some of them did not have faith, and he later destroyed them.* CEV

b) Do Not Be Afraid (I): Instructions

Do not be afraid or discouraged

Deut 1:21 [Moses, to the Israelites:] Look, he [God] has placed the land in front of you! Go up, take possession of it, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, said to do. *Do not be afraid or discouraged!* NET

Do not be afraid – have faith in God, trusting in him

Acts 27:23–25 [Paul, to others with him on a boat in a severe storm:] For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve came to me [24]and said, *'Do not be afraid, Paul!* You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.' [25]Therefore keep up your courage, men, for *I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told.* NET

Ps 56:3–4 [David, to God:] *When I am afraid, I trust in you.* [4]*In God* – I boast in his promise – *in God I trust, I am not afraid. What can mere men do to me?* NET

John 14:1 *Jesus said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me.* NCV™

Do not be afraid – be confident

Ps 27:3 [David:] *Even when an army is deployed against me, I do not fear. Even when war is imminent, I remain confident.* NET

Do not be afraid – be strong and courageous . . .

Josh 1:6–7, 9, 18b [God, to Joshua:] *"Be strong and courageous, because you'll be leading this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors.* [7]*Only be strong and very courageous* to ensure that you obey all the instructions that my servant Moses gave you—turn neither to the right nor to the left from it—so that you may succeed wherever you go. … [9]*"I've commanded you, haven't I? Be strong and courageous. Don't be fearful or discouraged,* because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." … [18]*… Only be strong and courageous."* ISV

. . . Look to God for your strength

1Sam 30:6 David was very upset, for the men were thinking of stoning him; each man grieved bitterly over his sons and daughters. *But David drew strength from the Lord his God.* NET

Eph 6:10–11 [Paul, to believers:] Finally, *be strengthened in the Lord* [Christ] *and in the strength of his power.* [11]*Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.* NET

Do not even be afraid of death

Rev 2:10 [Jesus Christ:] *Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer.* The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. *Remain faithful even to the point of death*, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. NET

c) Do Not Be Afraid (II): Reasons

God is far more powerful than our enemies

2Chr 32:7–8 [King Hezekiah, to his army:] *"Be strong and brave! Don't be afraid and don't panic because of the king of Assyria and this huge army that is with him! We have with us one who is stronger than those who are with him.* [8]*He has with him mere human strength, but the Lord our God is with us to help us and fight our battles!" The army was encouraged by the words* of King Hezekiah of Judah. NET

God is always with his people

Deut 31:6, 8 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *Be strong and courageous! Do not fear or tremble before them, for the Lord your God is the one who is going with you. He will not fail you or abandon you!" …* [8]*The Lord is indeed going before you – he will be with you; he will not fail you or abandon you. Do not be afraid or discouraged!* NET

God helps his people

Ps 46:1–3 God is our strong refuge; *he is truly our helper in times of trouble.* [2]*For this reason we do not fear* when the earth shakes, and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, [3]when its waves crash and foam, and the mountains shake before the surging sea. (Selah) NET

Heb 13:6 So we can say with confidence, "*The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" NET

God saves his people

Jer 46:27 [GOD:] You descendants of Jacob, my servants, *do not be afraid; do not be terrified, people of Israel. For I will rescue you and your descendants from the faraway lands where you are captives.* The descendants of Jacob will return to their land and enjoy peace. They will be secure and no one will terrify them. NET

God is a refuge for his people, protecting them

Ps 91:4–7 *He* [God] *will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.* [5]*You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,* [6]*nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.* [7]*A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.* ESV

> Verse 4a likens God's protection of his people to that of a bird protecting its young. The term "pinions" means the outer part of a bird's wing. A "buckler" (v. 4b) is a type of shield.

God's promised blessings

Zec 8:15 [GOD, THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] But *now I am planning to bless the people of Jerusalem and Judah. So don't be afraid.* GNT

Luke 12:32 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is well pleased to give you the kingdom.* NET

> Although they appeared vulnerable like a "little flock", the disciples were to inherit the kingdom, with the associated authority. As this was their destiny, there was no need to be afraid of what might be encountered in the meantime.

Further reasons

Luke 12:6–7 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Aren't five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God.* [7]*In fact, even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.* NET

Isa 43:1–5 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.* [2]*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* [3]*For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.* [4]*Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.* [5]*Fear not, for I am with you*; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. ESV

> There are a number of reasons given here as to why the people should not fear, including some given in the preceding subsections. Further reasons given here are: God has redeemed his people and they are his (vv. 1, 4b); they are precious and honored in his sight (v. 4a); and he loves them (v. 4a).

Note: Being afraid has grave consequences

Prov 29:25 *The fear of people becomes a snare*, but whoever trusts in the LORD will be set on high. NET

Jer 1:17 [GOD:] But you, Jeremiah, get yourself ready! Go and tell these people everything I instruct you to say. *Do not be terrified of them, or I will give you good reason to be terrified of them.* NET

d) Do Not Worry

Do not worry – trust God with your concerns . . .

Phil 4:6–7 *Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and*

petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. [7]And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. NET

1Pet 5:7 *Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you.* NCV™

. . . Ask God to provide for your physical needs

Luke 11:2b–3 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] When you pray, say: Father, may your name be honored; may your kingdom come. [3]*Give us each day our daily bread, …* NET

Do not worry about the cares of this life for God will provide

Matt 6:25–34 [JESUS:] Therefore I tell you, *do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing?* [26]Look at the birds in the sky: They do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, *yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you more valuable than they are?* [27]*And which of you by worrying can add even one hour to his life?* [28]*Why do you worry about clothing?* Think about how the flowers of the field grow; they do not work or spin. [29]Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these! [30]And *if this is how God clothes the wild grass, which is here today and tomorrow is tossed into the fire to heat the oven, won't he clothe you even more, you people of little faith?* [31]*So then, don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'* [32]For the unconverted pursue these things, and *your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* [33]*But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* [34]*So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.* NET

> Note that v. 33 indicates that rather than worrying about the cares of this life, we should focus instead on things of God

The futility and dangers of worrying about the cares of this life

Luke 12:25–26 And *which of you by worrying can add an hour to his life?* [26]*So if you cannot do such a very little thing as this, why do you worry about the rest?* NET

Matt 13:22 [JESUS, EXPLAINING THE MEANING OF A PARABLE:] The seeds that fell among the thornbushes are also people who hear the message. *But they start worrying about the needs of this life and are fooled by the desire to get rich. So the message gets choked out, and they never produce anything.* CEV

> Being worried and preoccupied with the cares of this life can "crowd out" the place of God's word and his kingdom in our lives, choking our spiritual lives.

e) Do Not Trust in Other Things

Do not trust in other people, but rather trust in God . . .

Jer 17:5–6 The LORD says, *"I will put a curse on people who trust in mere human beings, who depend on mere flesh and blood for their strength*, and whose hearts have turned away from the LORD. [6]They will be like a shrub in the desert. They will not experience good things even when they happen. It will be as though they were growing in the desert, in a salt land where no one can live. NET

Ps 118:8–9 *It is better to take shelter in the LORD than to trust in people.* [9]*It is better to take shelter in the LORD than to trust in princes.* NET

. . . People are not worth trusting in

Ps 146:3–4 *Don't put your trust in human leaders; no human being can save you.* [4]*When they die, they return to the dust; on that day all their plans come to an end.* GNT

Do not trust in yourself

Prov 28:26 *The one who trusts in himself is stupid*, but the one who lives wisely will be kept safe. ISV

Prov 3:5 *Trust in the* LORD *with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.* NET

Do not trust in riches

Prov 11:28 *The one who trusts in his riches will fall,* but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf. NET

Do not trust in worldly power

Isa 31:1 [ISAIAH, TO HIS PEOPLE:] *Those who go down to Egypt for help are as good as dead, those who rely on war horses, and trust in Egypt's many chariots and in their many, many horsemen.* But they do not rely on the Holy One of Israel and do not seek help from the LORD. NET

Do not trust in wickedness

Isa 47:10–11 [GOD, TO THE BABYLONIANS:] For *you have trusted in your wickedness*; You have said, 'No one sees me'; Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; And you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me.' [11]*Therefore evil shall come upon you; You shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; You will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, Which you shall not know.* NKJV

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 23

Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

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I. Loving and Fearing God

Love and fear are two emotions or attitudes that we should have towards God, and arguably they stand alone as such. The Bible states that loving God is of the utmost importance. Fearing God is also shown to be critical. Like loving God, understanding and having the fear of God that the Bible teaches helps and benefits us in many ways.

Note that both love and fear of God are closely associated with obeying him (the theme of the second half of this chapter). They are very strong, compelling emotions and provide the primary emotional stimuli for obeying God (cf. Deut 10:12–13) – supplementing intellectual stimuli arising out of such things as faith. Moreover, the Bible indicates that our love and fear of God are actually expressed primarily in obeying him.

a) Love God

Love God . . .

Ps 31:23a *Love the LORD, all you faithful followers of his!* NET

Ps 116:1 [A PSALMIST:] *I love the LORD, because he has heard my prayer for mercy.* ISV

. . . Love Jesus Christ

Eph 6:24 Grace be with all of those who *love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love*. NET

Love and treasure God's word

Ps 119:97, 140, 165 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *O how I love your law! All day long I meditate on it. …* 140*Your word is absolutely pure, and your servant loves it! …* 165*Those who love your law are completely secure; nothing causes them to stumble.* NET

Job 23:12 [JOB:] I have not left his commands behind. *I have treasured his words in my heart.* GW

Love for God and Jesus Christ is shown by obeying them

1Jn 5:3 *We show our love for God by obeying his commandments*, and they are not hard to follow. CEV

John 14:23–24 *Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my word*, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him. 24*The person who does not love me does not obey my words.* And the word you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me. NET

1Ki 3:3a *Solomon showed he loved the LORD by following the commands* his father David had given him … NCV™

Love for them is linked with loving and caring for other Christians

1Jn 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God's child, and *whoever loves the Father also loves the Father's children*. NCV™

Heb 6:10 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and *the love you have demonstrated for his name, in having served and continuing to serve the saints*. NET

b) The Importance of Loving God

Loving God is of the utmost importance

Matt 22:37–40 Jesus said to him, *"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38This is the first and greatest commandment.* 39The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40*All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."* NET

God and Jesus Christ love those who love them

Neh 1:5 And I [Nehemiah] said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome *God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him* and keep his commandments, … ESV

John 14:21b [Jesus:] *The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him* and will reveal myself to him. NET

Note that the last clause refers to Jesus Christ revealing himself to those who love him, along with loving them.

God cares for those who love him

Ps 91:14–15 *God says, "I will save those who love me* and will protect those who acknowledge me as Lord. [15]*When they call to me, I will answer them; when they are in trouble, I will be with them. I will rescue them and honor them.* GNT

Ps 145:20 *The Lord protects those who love him*, but he destroys all the wicked. NET

Various spiritual blessings from loving God

Rom 8:28 And we know that *for those who love God all things work together for good*, for those who are called according to his purpose. ESV

1Cor 8:3 But *if someone loves God, he is known by God*. NET

God of course knows everything about all people, but he knows his own people in a unique way in that he has a personal, intimate relationship with them – which may be what Paul has in mind here. A related interpretation is that "known by God" refers to being recognized by God as one of his own.

Blessings in the afterlife from loving God

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of *the kingdom that he promised to those who love him*? NET

1Cor 2:9 But as it is written, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him."* ISV

Note that as well as blessings of the afterlife, this is probably also referring to – or at least is applicable to – blessings of the present life.

c) Fear God

Fearing God is more than just having reverence for him. A sound appreciation of God's holiness and wrath, along with his supreme power, produces a genuine fear of incurring his displeasure. But this does not involve anxiety or terror for those who seek to please him and who understand his grace.

Clearly, fearing God moves us to obey him. It also evokes and supplements such things as worship and service, and even trust (cf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*). When we grasp the concepts involved and willingly do fear God, we learn to gladly do so, even treasuring verses that call on us to fear God.

Fear and be in awe of God

1Pet 1:17 If you call "Father" the one who judges everyone impartially according to what he has done, *you must live in the fear of the Lord* as long as you are strangers here [on earth]. ISV

Ps 33:8 *Let the whole earth fear the Lord! Let all who live in the world stand in awe of him!* NET

Fear God to the extent that you tremble before him . . .

Ps 119:120a [A psalmist, to God:] *My flesh trembles out of fear of you*, and I am in awe of your judgments. ISV

Ps 96:9 Worship the Lord in holy attire! *Tremble before him, all the earth!* NET

. . . and tremble at God's word

Isa 66:2b [God:] I will pay attention to those who are humble and sorry for their sins and who *tremble at my word*. GW

Do not fear anyone or anything but God

Matt 10:28 *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* NET

Isa 8:12–13 [God, to Isaiah:] People are saying that others make plans against them, but you should not believe them. *Don't be afraid of what they fear; do not dread those things.* [13]*But remember that the Lord All-Powerful is holy. He is the one you should fear; he is the one you should dread.* NCV™

Note that if a person truly fears God, they are practically unable to fear anyone or anything else.

Note: God's people should not live in fear of his punishment

1Jn 4:16b–18 [John, to believers:] God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them. [17]*Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on Judgment Day; and we will have it because our life in this world is the same as Christ's.* [18]*There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.* GNT

In v. 18 "love" appears to be referring to the love of God that is manifested in the Christian – the love that God has for them and they in turn show to others (v. 16), revealing themselves to be like God or Christ (v. 17b). Knowing and expressing such love drives out anxious fear of punishment from God (v. 18) – particularly as those who live in love live in God, and God in them (v. 16b). Knowledge of such love cannot coexist with anxious fear of God's punishment; they are incompatible, both logically and experientially. As such we can look towards Judgment Day with courage and confidence (v. 17).

Having a godly fear of God's punishment is a good thing, as it leads us to spurn sin and to not turn away from God. However, living with God's love – and under his grace – believers ought not to live in anxious fear of God's punishment.

d) Why God Should Be Feared

God's surpassing greatness and sovereignty

Jer 10:6–7 *There is none like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might.* [7]*Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.* ESV

God's great deeds . . .

1Sam 12:24 However, *fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. Just look at the great things he has done for you!* NET

. . . including God's creative work and control over nature

Ps 33:8–9 *Let the whole earth fear the Lord! Let all who live in the world stand in awe of him!* [9]*For he spoke, and it came into existence, he issued the decree, and it stood firm.* NET

Josh 4:23–24 [Joshua, to the Israelites:] *The Lord your God dried up the Jordan ahead of you until you had crossed, as he did to the Red Sea until we had crossed.* [24]*The Lord did this so that everyone in the world would know his mighty power and that you would fear the Lord your God every day of your life.* GW

God's anger and judgment

Ps 76:7–9 [A psalmist, to God:] But you, *you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?* [8]*From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still,* [9]*when God arose to establish judgment,* to save all the humble of the earth. Selah ESV

God's holiness

Rev 15:4a *Who will not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name, because you alone are holy?* NET

God's holiness involves his separateness from and intolerance of that which is morally impure, with the latter leading to his judgment. Thus God's holiness – awesome in itself – and its grave implications give good reason to fear him.

God's love

Ps 33:18 Behold, *the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,* … ESV

This associates fearing God and having one's hope in God's love. Arguably it suggests that God's love towards his people is a reason why they fear him.

God's forgiveness

Ps 130:4 [A psalmist, to God:] But *with you there is forgiveness, so that you may be feared.* ISV

Without God's forgiveness the fear of God that the Bible commands would not be possible – it being a fear which encompasses (among other things) worship, service and even longing for God. In place of it there would only be terror.

e) The Importance of Fearing God (I): Godly Living

Fearing God is closely associated with obeying him

Eccl 12:13 [A WISE TEACHER:] Having heard everything, I have reached this conclusion: *Fear God and keep his commandments*, because this is the whole duty of man. NET

> Fear of God and obedience of God are often spoken of in conjunction with each other, to the point where it would appear they are inseparable in practice. A key reason for this close relationship is that fear of God, with an appreciation of his power and wrath, is a great stimulus to obeying him.

Fear of God is associated with righteous living

Acts 10:35 Indeed, the person who *fears him and does what is right* is acceptable to him in any nation. ISV

Fearing God compels one to avoid sin and evil

Ex 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, *so the fear of him may be present with you in order that you don't sin*." ISV

Prov 16:6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and *by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil*. ESV

Fearing God ensures we deal rightly with others

Lev 25:17, 43 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God*, for I am the LORD your God. ... [43]*You shall not rule over him* [a servant] *ruthlessly but shall fear your God.* ESV

Not fearing God is linked with ungodliness – and the consequences

Ps 36:1 *An evil man is rebellious to the core. He does not fear God*, ... NET

Ps 55:19 [A PSALMIST, SPEAKING OF WICKED ENEMIES:] *God will give ear and humble them*, he who is enthroned from of old, *because they do not change and do not fear God.* ISV

f) The Importance of Fearing God (II): Blessings

God delivers and protects those who fear him

Ps 33:18–19 Behold, *the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,* [19]*that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine*. ESV

Prov 14:26 *In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.* ESV

Fear of God leads to life

Prov 19:23 *Fearing the LORD leads to life, and one who does so will live satisfied*; he will not be afflicted by calamity. NET

> OT verses (such as this one) which speak of fearing God leading to "life", generally have in view: life as opposed to premature death; and/or a fullness of life.

Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom

Ps 111:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.* His praise endures forever! ISV

Further present-day blessings of fearing God

Ps 103:11, 13 For *as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ...* [13]*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.* ESV

Acts 10:34–35 Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, [35]but *in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him*. NET

Future blessings for those who fear God

Mal 3:16–17 Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and *a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name.* [17]*"They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make*

up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. ESV

Rev 11:18 [Loud voices in heaven, to God:] The nations were angry, but your wrath has come. *It is time for the dead to be judged— to reward your servants, the prophets, the saints, and all who fear your name,* both unimportant and important, and to destroy those who destroy the earth. ISV

Both of the above passages have the day of God's final judgment in view.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Obeying God

See also:

▪ *a) The Need to Obey God*, p. 232

The concept of obeying God permeates the whole Bible – the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. It is fundamental to a functional and healthy relationship with God. A related concept is that of following Jesus Christ, which likewise is relevant to all aspects of the Christian's life.

Note the section cross-referenced above, which has been placed in *21. Being Right with God*, in the second half of the chapter which is entitled *Staying Right with God*. It is obviously also very pertinent to this topic, *Obeying God*.

a) Obey God

Keep God's commands and obey him

Deut 13:4 [Moses, to the Israelites:] You must follow the Lord your God and revere only him; and *you must observe his commandments, obey him*, serve him, and remain loyal to him. NET

Obey all God's commands

Josh 1:7–8 [God, to Joshua:] Make sure you are very strong and brave! *Carefully obey all the law my servant Moses charged you to keep! Do not swerve from it to the right or to the left*, so that you may be successful in all you do. [8]This law scroll must not leave your lips! You must memorize it day and night so you can *carefully obey all that is written in it*. Then you will prosper and be successful. NET

The Mosaic Law (the law given through Moses) was what God's covenant with Israel was based on. Under the new covenant instituted by Jesus Christ, believers are still to obey all the law's commands that remain pertinent under the new covenant. These commands are basically those pertaining to the believer's spiritual relationship with God and their relationships with other people.

Obey God always – forever

Ps 119:112 [A psalmist, to God:] *I am determined to obey your statutes at all times, to the very end.* NET

Do God's will . . .

Ezra 10:11a Now give praise to the Lord God of your fathers, and *do his will*. NET

1Pet 4:2 From now on, then, you must *live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires*. GNT

. . . Do what pleases God

1Thes 4:1 [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] Brothers and sisters, we taught you how to *live in a way that will please God, and you are living that way. Now we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus to live that way even more.* NCV™

Obey Jesus Christ

Matt 28:19–20 [Jesus, to his disciples:] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20]teaching them to *obey everything I have commanded you*. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. NET

We should obey God because he is our God . . .

Ezek 20:19 [God, to the Israelites:] *I am the Lord your God; follow my statutes, observe my regulations, and carry them out.* NET

. . . It is no good expressing commitment to God and Jesus Christ without obeying them

Ezek 33:31 [God, to the prophet Ezekiel:] So *they come to you in crowds as if they were really ready to listen. They sit in front of you as if they were my people and hear your words, but they will not obey them. With their mouths they tell me they love me, but their hearts desire their selfish profits.* NCV™

Luke 6:46 [Jesus, to those who merely professed him as their Lord:] *Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do what I tell you?* NET

Implicit in both of the above verses is the pointlessness of such words and actions.

We should obey God because of the great things he has done for us . . .

Ps 105:43–45 [A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD'S DEEDS FOR ISRAEL:] *When he led his people out, they rejoiced; his chosen ones shouted with joy.* [44]*He handed the territory of nations over to them, and they took possession of what other peoples had produced,* [45]*so that they might keep his commands and obey his laws.* Praise the LORD! NET

We should obey God because of all that he has done for us and moreover because our obedience is in fact one of the chief objectives of all his deeds for us (v. 45a). A corollary of this is that if we do not obey we will forfeit God's blessings which are a key part of all the things he does for us.

. . . and we should obey Jesus Christ because he died for us

2Cor 5:14–15 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For *the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all*; therefore all have died. [15]*And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised.* NET

Christ's love shown in him dying for his people compelled Paul to live for Christ.

b) Learn God's Commands – and All His Word

In order to obey God we need to learn his commands. Moreover, we should learn all aspects of God's word.

Learn God's commands

Deut 5:1 Moses called all the people of Israel together and said: *Listen, Israel, to the commands and laws I am giving you today. Learn them* and obey them carefully. NCV™

Ask God to teach you his commands

Ps 119:26b–27 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Teach me your statutes!* [27]*Help me to understand what your precepts mean!* Then I can meditate on your marvelous teachings. NET

Persistently read and study God's commands – and all of God's word

Deut 17:19 *It* [a copy of God's law] *must be with him constantly and he must read it as long as he lives,* so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and observe all the words of this law and these statutes and carry them out. NET

Ezra 7:10 Now *Ezra had dedicated himself to the study of the law of the LORD,* to its observance, and to teaching its statutes and judgments in Israel. NET

Acts 18:24 At that time a Jew named Apollos, who had been born in Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and *had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures*. GNT

Having "a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures", Apollos is a good example of one who would have persistently read and studied all of God's word.

Listen carefully and pay attention to God's word and commands

Ex 15:26 He said, "If you will *listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what he considers right*, if you *pay attention to his commands and obey all his laws*, I will never make you suffer any of the diseases I made the Egyptians suffer, because I am the LORD, who heals you." GW

Listen carefully to Jesus' teaching

Mark 7:14 Then he [Jesus] called the crowd again and said to them, "*Listen to me, everyone, and understand.* NET

Pay attention to all Christian teaching

Heb 2:1 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Therefore *we must pay closer attention to what we have heard*, so that we do not drift away. NET

Accept God's word

Job 22:22 *Accept instruction from his mouth and store up his words in your heart.* NET

John 17:8 [Jesus, to God:] *I gave them the teachings you gave me, and they accepted them.* They knew that I truly came from you, and they believed that you sent me. NCV™

We must accept and so believe God's word - both his commands (cf. Job 22:22) and other truths of the faith (cf. John 17:8).

Note: Not listening to God's word has ill consequences

Jer 6:19 [God:] Hear, O earth, *I'm about to bring calamity on this people, on the fruit of their plans, because they didn't listen to my words and they rejected my instruction.* ISV

c) How to Obey God

See also:

- *F*, p. 240
- *L*, p. 250
- *F*, p. 253
- *II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy*, p. 406

The previous section largely looked at learning God's words and commands, which is necessary in order to know what God wants us to do in obeying him. This section discusses how, on learning God's commands, we should set about obeying him.

Note also the supplementary teachings in the above cross references, which indicate that obedience to God is produced by such things as love of God, fear of God and faith in God.

Do what you learn of God's law and word . . .

Ezra 7:10 For *Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it* and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. ESV

Matt 7:24 [Jesus:] *Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock.* NET

. . . Do not just listen to God's word

James 1:22 But *be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves.* NET

Ask God to help you follow his ways and commands

Ps 25:5a [David, to God:] *Teach me to live according to your truth*, for you are my God, who saves me. GNT

Ps 119:33–36 *Teach me, O Lord, the lifestyle prescribed by your statutes, so that I might observe it continually.* [34]*Give me understanding so that I might observe your law, and keep it with all my heart.* [35]*Guide me in the path of your commands, for I delight to walk in it.* [36]*Give me a desire for your rules*, rather than for wealth gained unjustly. NET

Submit yourself to God

James 4:7 So *submit to God*. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. NET

To persistently obey God, we need to first submit to him.

Obey God wholeheartedly

Ps 119:69 [A psalmist, to God:] Arrogant people smear my reputation with lies, but *I observe your precepts with all my heart.* NET

Rejoice and delight in God's commands

Ps 119:14 [A psalmist, to God:] *I rejoice in the lifestyle prescribed by your rules as if they were riches of all kinds.* NET

Ps 119:47 [A psalmist, to God:] I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, [47]for *I find my delight in your commandments, which I love*. ESV

Be careful to obey God

2Ki 17:37a *You must carefully obey at all times the rules, regulations, law, and commandments he wrote down for you.* NET

Note: God's and Jesus Christ's commands are not too difficult

Deut 30:11 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *This commandment I am giving you today is not too difficult for you*, nor is it too remote. NET

Matt 11:28–30 [Jesus:] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. [29]Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30]For *my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.* NET

> The "yoke" referred to was probably that which lay across the necks of oxen. In saying that the "yoke" and "load" of following him is "easy" and "not hard to carry" (v. 30), Jesus may be alluding to the fact that as he is "gentle and humble in heart" (v. 29) he will not require anything that is beyond us. Also, far from being tiresome, his "yoke" of discipleship is the way of life that best fits us – the most comfortable and suitable "yoke" – and it benefits us in many ways. Rather than weighing us down, it is actually uplifting.

d) Blessings of Obeying God

See also:

- ., p. 183
- *a) The Need to Obey God*, p. 232
- *G*, p. 269
- *O*, p. 359

General promises of blessing

Luke 11:28 But he [Jesus] replied, *"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"* NET

John 13:17 [Jesus, to his disciples:] If you know these things, *blessed are you if you do them.* ESV

> Note that Jesus is referring primarily to his instruction and example regarding humble service of other believers (cf. vv. 4–16).

God's and Jesus Christ's love

Ps 103:17–18 But *the Lord continually shows loyal love to his faithful followers, and is faithful to their descendants, [18]to those who keep his covenant, who are careful to obey his commands.* NET

John 15:10 [Jesus:] *If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love.* NET

God's help

Isa 64:5 [Isaiah, to God:] *You help all who gladly obey and do what you want …* CEV

The realization of God's promises

Gen 18:19 [God, referring to Abraham:] I have chosen him so that he may command his children and his household after him *to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then the Lord will give to Abraham what he promised him.* NET

Heb 10:36 For you need endurance in order to *do God's will and so receive what is promised*. NET

Peace and rest

Isa 48:18 [God, to the people of Israel:] *If you had obeyed me, you would have had peace like a full-flowing river.* Good things would have flowed to you like the waves of the sea. NCV™

Jer 6:16a The Lord said to his people: "You are standing at the crossroads. So consider your path. Ask where the old, reliable paths are. *Ask where the path is that leads to blessing and follow it. If you do, you will find rest for your souls."* NET

> The "path" corresponds with God's way, i.e. life lived in obedience to him.

Other present-day spiritual blessings

Luke 8:21 But he [Jesus] replied to them, *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."* NET

John 15:7 [Jesus:] *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you.* NET

> Being in Jesus Christ involves knowing, believing and obeying his words. This produces prayer that is consistent with Jesus Christ's purpose and will – prayer that will be answered.

Note: Ill consequences of not obeying God

See also:

- *N*, p. 233

Hos 9:17a [Hosea, referring to the people of Israel:] *My God will reject them, for they have not obeyed him …* NET

Num 32:23 [Moses:] But *if you do not do this, then look, you will have sinned against the Lord. And know that your sin will find you out.* NET

The final clause is implying that sin (or disobeying God) brings its consequences – it "catches up with you".

e) Epilogue: Follow Jesus Christ

To follow Jesus Christ involves not just simply following his commands, but also following him and his example. In doing so, we follow Christ not only as our leader, but also in companionship with him. This concept is an important aspect of discipleship.

Follow Jesus Christ . . .

Matt 4:19b–20 [Jesus, to Peter and Andrew:] *"Follow me, and I will turn you into fishers of people."* [20]*They left their nets immediately and followed him.* NET

Mark 8:34 Then Jesus called the crowd, along with his disciples, and said to them, *"If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.* NET

To "deny" ourselves involves setting aside our own desires, no longer having ourselves as the focus of our lives. For a person to "take up his cross" implies a willingness to bear any cost – even to give up one's life – in order to follow Christ as his disciple.

. . . Be a disciple of Jesus Christ

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *"If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples …* NET

A disciple is one who seeks to learn and follow the teachings of another, even to the extent of becoming like the teacher (as reflected in the following two subsections).

Follow Jesus Christ's example

John 13:15 [Jesus, to his disciples:] For *I have given you an example – you should do just as I have done for you.* NET

1Cor 11:1 [Paul:] Follow my example, as I *follow the example of Christ.* NCV™

Follow Jesus Christ's example of love and service of others

John 13:34 [Jesus, to his disciples:] I give you a new commandment – to *love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* NET

Matt 20:26–28 [Jesus, to his disciples:] It must not be this way among you! Instead *whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant,* [27]*and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave –*[28]*just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve,* and to give his life as a ransom for many. NET

Make Jesus Christ your Lord . . .

1Pet 3:15 But *set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts* and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. NET

. . . Live for Jesus Christ, pleasing him

2Cor 5:15 And he [Christ] died for all so that *those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised.* NET

Col 1:10 [Paul, to the Colossian believers:] We pray that you will also have great wisdom and understanding in spiritual things [10]so that you will *live the kind of life that honors and pleases the Lord in every way.* You will produce fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. NCV™

Be willing to give up everything to follow Jesus Christ

Luke 5:27–28 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax collector's booth. *Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"* [28]*So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.* NCV™

Luke 14:33 In the same way," concluded Jesus, *"none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.* GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 24

Connecting with God

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I. Being Close to God

Being or growing close to God involves consciously seeking God and focusing on him. Additionally, we can actually meet with God and also should live throughout each day in awareness of his presence. In growing close to God, we come to know him – the importance of which is emphatically stated by the Bible.

a) Seek God

"Seeking" typically entails intense effort, which is very much applicable to seeking God and fellowship with him. Seeking God also requires prayer, worship and obedience – along with persistently focusing on God, as per the following section, *Focus on God*.

Seek God – with all your heart

1Chr 22:19a Now *seek the LORD your God wholeheartedly and with your entire being!* NET

Ps 119:10 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *With all my heart I seek you*. Do not allow me to stray from your commands! NET

Seek God wholeheartedly and you will find him

Deut 4:29 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] But *if you seek the LORD your God from there* [in exile], *you will find him, if, indeed, you seek him with all your heart and soul*. NET

Seeking God should be accompanied by obedience to him

2Chr 14:4 *He* [Asa] *ordered Judah to seek the LORD God of their ancestors and to observe his law and commands.* NET

Seek God and his help through prayer and fasting

Dan 9:3 [DANIEL:] Then I turned my face to the Lord God, *seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting* and sackcloth and ashes. ESV

Blessings of seeking God

Ps 34:10 Even young lions sometimes lack food and are hungry, but *those who seek the LORD lack no good thing*. NET

Lam 3:25 *The LORD is good to those who trust in him, to the one who seeks him.* NET

Not seeking God has detrimental results

2Chr 12:14 And *he* [Rehoboam] *did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD*. ESV

Zeph 1:6 [GOD:] *I will remove* those who have turned away from following the LORD and *those who no longer seek the LORD* or ask him for help. GW

Note: Desire God and things of God

Ps 73:25 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Whom have I in heaven but you? And *there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you*. ESV

Matt 5:6 Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, for they will be satisfied. NET

1Cor 14:1 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Pursue love, and *earnestly desire the spiritual gifts*, especially that you may prophesy. ESV

b) Focus on God

See also:

- *P*, p. 393

Keep thinking about God

Ps 63:6 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *I remember you while I'm lying in bed; I think about you through the night.* NCV™

Ps 26:3 [DAVID, TO GOD:] For *I am ever aware of your faithfulness, and your loyalty continually motivates me*. NET

Keep thinking about what God has done

Ps 143:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] I recall the old days; *I meditate on all you have done; I reflect on your accomplishments*. NET

Think about Jesus Christ – and his example

Heb 12:2–3 *We must keep our eyes on Jesus*, who leads us and makes our faith complete. *He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne!* [3]*So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up.* CEV

Look forward to what is to come in the afterlife . . .

2Cor 4:17–18 [PAUL:] And this small and temporary trouble we suffer *will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble.* [18]For *we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen.* What can be seen lasts only for a time, but *what cannot be seen lasts for ever.* GNT

In v. 18a, "things that are unseen" has primarily in view the "tremendous and eternal glory" (v. 17) to come - which "lasts for ever" (v. 18b).

. . . Do not dwell on the past

Phil 3:13b–14 [PAUL:] *Forgetting the things that are behind* and reaching out for the things that are ahead, [14]with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. NET

Further godly things to focus on

Rom 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but *those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ESV

Phil 4:8 [PAUL:] Finally, brothers and sisters, *whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things.* NET

c) Meet with God and Live before Him

We are to come before God, in awareness of his presence, to meet with him. Christians typically set aside some time everyday to do this, focussing fully on God. Generally this involves reading the Bible, prayer and even meditation.

Additionally, we are to constantly live before God in the sense of living in awareness of his presence, companionship, help and discernment of our lives. As such we should think, speak and act accordingly.

Prepare yourself to come before God, as shown in the OT practice of consecration

Ex 19:22 *Even the priests who approach the LORD must consecrate themselves.* Otherwise, the LORD will break out against them." ISV

To "consecrate" oneself means to set oneself apart for God or to dedicate oneself as sacred to him (cf. *C*, p. 304). It is also spoken of in the OT in regard to cleansing oneself before approaching God or entering his temple. In both cases it signifies ridding oneself of all that is sinful. As such, a parallel can be drawn between the OT practice of consecration and the need for believers to rid themselves of sinful practices in order to approach God.

Draw near to God . . .

Heb 10:19–22 Therefore, brothers and sisters, *since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,* [20]*by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,* [21]*and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* [22]*let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings,* because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. NET

. . . Come before God, meeting with him

Deut 31:11 [MOSES, TO LEADERS OF ISRAEL:] ... when *all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God* in the place he chooses, you must read this law before them within their hearing. NET

Just as the Israelites at times together came before God, believers can both individually and corporately come before God, to meet with him. Believers are in fact freer to do this, because of Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished (cf. Heb 10:19–22 ⇧).

Continue to live before God, in his presence . . .

Acts 23:1 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, *I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.*" ESV

Isa 23:18b Her [Tyre's] merchandise will belong to those who *live in the presence of the* LORD so that they will have plenty of food and expensive clothing. GW

. . . "Walk" with God

Gen 6:9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a godly man; he was blameless among his contemporaries. *He walked with God.* NET

> To "walk" with God involves living before him. It suggests a personal and interactive relationship, inclusive of such things as prayer and trust in God.

Act before God – in awareness of his presence and scrutiny

2Chr 31:20 This is what King Hezekiah did in Judah. *He did what was good and right and obedient before the* LORD *his God.* NCV™

2Cor 4:2 [PAUL:] Instead, we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use trickery or pervert God's word. *By clear statements of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience before God.* ISV

> Paul in effect claims to "tell the truth before God" (NLT), "in the sight of God" (NASB, NKJV, NRSV) – acting in accordance with what upright people would think to be right. Paul suggests that he spoke not only in awareness of God's presence, but also of his scrutiny.

d) Know God

Know God and Jesus Christ

1Jn 2:14a [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I write to you, children, because *you know the Father.* I write to you, parents, because *you know the One who existed from the beginning* [Christ]. NCV™

Jer 9:24 [GOD:] If people want to boast, they should boast about this: They should boast that they *understand and know me*. They should boast that they *know and understand that I, the* LORD, *act out of faithfulness, fairness, and justice in the earth* and that I desire people to do these things," says the LORD. NET

> We are to understand and know God – which includes appreciating that he acts in "faithfulness, fairness, and justice".

Knowing God is linked to obeying his commands

1Jn 2:3–4 Now *by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments.* [4]*The one who says "I have come to know God" and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar,* and the truth is not in such a person. NET

Knowing God is linked with loving and caring for others

1Jn 4:7–8 Dear friends, *let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God.* [8]*The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.* NET

Jer 22:16 *He* [King Josiah] *upheld the cause of the poor and needy.* So things went well for Judah.' *The* LORD *says, 'That is a good example of what it means to know me.'* NET

> Knowing God is manifested in caring for the poor and needy, amongst other things. Note that like 1 John 4:7–8 above, this verse may be implying that one who knows God reflects his character and deeds.

Knowing God aids godly living

2Pet 1:3 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him* who called us to his own glory and excellence, … ESV

> Note that the Greek for "knowledge" indicates a complete or additional knowledge, here implying a very close, personal relationship with God (cf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

Knowing God and Jesus Christ is vital for spiritual growth

Prov 9:10 Wisdom begins with respect for the LORD, and *understanding begins with knowing the Holy One.* NCV™

2Pet 3:18 But *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day. NET

Believers grow spiritually through Christ's grace and knowledge of him. As noted earlier (cf. 1:3 ⇧), the latter probably encompasses personal knowledge of him or knowing him personally.

Further blessings of knowing God

2Pet 1:2 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *May grace and peace be yours in full measure through your knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.* GNT

John 17:3 [JESUS, TO GOD:] *Now this is eternal life – that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ,* whom you sent. NET

Eternal life involves knowing God and Jesus Christ in an ongoing, progressive, intimate relationship. While this verse is not explicitly saying that eternal life is a blessing resulting from knowing God and Jesus Christ, it certainly at least associates knowing them with eternal life.

Note: Not knowing God leads to sin and evil

1Thes 4:5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Don't use your body for sexual sin like the people who do not know God.* NCV™

3Jn 1:11 [JOHN:] My dear friend, do not follow what is bad; follow what is good. The one who does good belongs to God. But *the one who does evil has never known God*. NCV™

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Praying to God

See also:

- *a) Pray for Each Other (I): General*, p. 289
- *b) Pray for Each Other (II): What to Ask*, p. 289
- *II. Praying in Hard Times*, p. 426

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges and one of the greatest responsibilities of being a Christian. It is also one of the main sources of vitality for our lives as Christians, and is critical to our effectiveness in our endeavors for God's kingdom. At the end of our lives, quite possibly many of us will see prayer as the main thing that we should have done more often. As the saying goes: "Life is short; pray hard."

a) The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is portrayed as an offering to God

Rev 8:3–4 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] Another angel holding a golden censer came and was stationed at the altar. A large amount of incense was given to him *to offer up, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar that is before the throne.* [4]*The smoke coming from the incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.* NET

Prayer is very powerful . . .

James 5:16b–18 *The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.* [17]*Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months!* [18]*Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest.* NET

. . . If we ask God for things, he will give or do them

Matt 7:7–8 [JESUS:] *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.* [8]*For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.* NET

Matt 18:19–20 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] Again, I tell you the truth, *if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.* [20]For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them. NET

The tremendous promises of answered prayer in this subsection are obviously not an automatic guarantee that every request will be granted (cf. *Epilogue: God's Response to Requests*, p. 269). Amongst other things (cf. *Making Requests*, p. 268), such prayer must be consistent with God and Jesus Christ's purpose and will (cf. 1Jn 5:14–15) – which Jesus may have in view here with his reference to those asking being "assembled in my name" (v. 20). Nevertheless, such wonderful promises should greatly encourage us to pray fervently and persistently – which is in view with the use of "ask", "seek" and "knock" in Matthew 7:7–8 above.

We help others by praying for them

2Cor 1:10–11 [PAUL, REFERRING TO GOD'S DELIVERANCE:] From such terrible dangers of death he saved us, and will save us; and we have placed our hope in him that *he will save us again,* [11]*as you help us by means of your prayers for us. So it will be that the many prayers for us will be answered, and God will bless us*; and many will raise their voices to him in thanksgiving for us. GNT

We are called on to pray

Col 4:2 *Be devoted to prayer*, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. NET

b) Praying before God

Pray before God, in his presence

1Ki 8:28 [SOLOMON, TO GOD:] Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to *the prayer that your servant prays before you* this day, … ESV

Neh 1:4b [NEHEMIAH:] I fasted and *prayed in the presence of the God of Heaven*. ISV

To pray "before" God (cf. 1Ki 8:28) effectively means to pray in his presence (cf. Neh 1:4b), being mindful of his presence.

Approach God with confidence

Heb 4:15–16 For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. [16]Therefore *let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help.* NET

In view of Jesus Christ's role as our high priest (v. 15) we are to approach God with confidence – both in regard to him receiving us and to him hearing our prayers (v. 16).

Be reverent . . .

Eph 3:14 [PAUL:] *I kneel in prayer to the Father.* CEV

Kneeling in prayer – "fall to my knees and pray" (NLT) – is indicative of reverence for God, and submission to him.

. . . and humble yourself before God

2Chr 33:12–13 In his pain *Manasseh asked the LORD his God for mercy and truly humbled himself before the God of his ancestors.* [13]*When he prayed to the LORD*, the LORD responded to him and answered favorably his cry for mercy. The LORD brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh realized that the LORD is the true God. NET

Pray to God as a caring father

Matt 6:9 Therefore, *this is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven*, may your name be kept holy. ISV

Matt 7:9–11 [JESUS:] Is there anyone among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? [10]Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? [11]If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* NET

Having a holy and loving Father in heaven should inspire us to make requests of him, doing so in awareness of him being such a Father. Note that the term "evil" (v. 11) is used here in a relative sense – in comparison to God and his standards.

Pray in the Holy Spirit

Jude 1:20 But dear friends, use your most holy faith to build yourselves up, *praying in the Holy Spirit.* NCV™

Having the Holy Spirit, believers are to pray "in the Holy Spirit". As such we are to consciously rely on the Holy Spirit's help, to empower and guide us in our prayers.

c) Physical Aspects of Prayer

Pray aloud . . .

Acts 4:24 When they [the believers] heard this, *they all raised their voices to God and said, "Master, you made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them., ...* ISV

. . . or pray in your heart

1Sam 1:13a *She* [Hannah] *was praying in her heart so her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.* NCV™

Pray anywhere

Acts 10:9 About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, *Peter went up on the roof to pray.* NET

Acts 21:5b *We knelt on the beach and prayed.* CEV

Pray anytime

Ps 55:17 [DAVID:] *Evening and morning and at noon I will pray*, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice. NKJV

Pray constantly

1Thes 5:16–18 Always rejoice, [17]*constantly pray*, [18]in everything give thanks. *For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* NET

Spend long periods alone in prayer – like Jesus did

Luke 6:12 Now it was during this time that *Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent all night in prayer to God.* NET

Keep alert to pray

Eph 6:18b *Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray always for all God's people.* GNT

Postures used in prayer

Acts 20:36 And when he [Paul] had said these things, *he knelt down and prayed with them all*. ESV

2Sam 7:18a Then King David went into the Tent of the Lord's presence, *sat down and prayed* ... GNT

Mark 11:25 *Whenever you stand praying*, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your sins. NET

Note: Do not pray for show and do not babble on

Matt 6:5–8 [JESUS:] *When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward.* [6]*When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you.* [7]*When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers.* [8]*Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.* CEV

d) Making Requests

Note that the teaching on prayer in general in the previous two sections is also very pertinent to making requests to God in prayer.

Ask for things in Jesus Christ's "name"

John 16:23, 26a [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] On that day, you will not ask me for anything. Truly, I tell all of you with certainty, *whatever you ask the Father for in my name, he will give it to you.* ... [26]*On that day, you will ask in my name.* ISV

In Jewish thought, a person's name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and purpose/s. As such, to ask in Jesus Christ's "name" is to do so in accordance with all that his name signifies. It is prayer that is compatible with Jesus Christ himself and his purposes – and made on his authority.

When praying, people often use the phrase "in Jesus Christ's name" (or "in Jesus' name") to signify that they are asking for something in Jesus Christ's "name". The usage of the phrase does not by itself mean that the prayer is necessarily in accordance with Jesus Christ's "name". Along with being conscious of and acknowledging Jesus Christ's authority and role in our making of requests to God, the content of the prayer is also at issue. Thus asking for things in Jesus Christ's "name" concerns both how we ask and what we ask. Bear in mind that the deeper one's relationship with Jesus Christ becomes, the better-equipped one becomes to make requests of God in Jesus Christ's "name".

Note that in the above verses, "On that day" (vv. 23, 26a) refers to the time following Jesus' ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – inclusive of the present age.

Ask earnestly . . .

Ps 119:145 *I cried out with all my heart, "Answer me, O LORD!* I will observe your statutes." NET

Luke 22:44 And *in his anguish he* [Jesus] *prayed more earnestly*, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. NET

. . . Even fast when making requests of God

Ezra 8:21, 23 [EZRA:] *I called for a fast there by the Ahava Canal, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and seek from him a safe journey* for us, our children, and all our property. ... [23]*So we fasted and prayed to our God about this, and he answered us.* NET

Ask persistently

Luke 18:1 Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to *pray all the time and never give up*. ISV

1Tim 5:5 But the widow who is truly in need, and completely on her own, has set her hope on God and *continues in her pleas and prayers night and day*. NET

Believe and do not doubt that what you ask will be granted

James 1:6–8 But *when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind.* [7-8]*Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.* NCV™

Matt 21:18–22 Now early in the morning, as he [Jesus] returned to the city, he was hungry. [19]After noticing a fig tree by the road he went to it, but found nothing on it except leaves. He said to it, "Never again will there be fruit from you!" And the fig tree withered at once. [20]When the disciples saw it they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" [21]Jesus answered them, "I tell you the truth, *if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen.* [22]*And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive.*" NET

Belief is vital in petitioning God, particularly in regard to things that seem impossible, as Jesus figuratively points out (v. 21). But belief is not merely making yourself "believe" what you do not really believe. Instead, it involves an understanding of God's will and genuinely trusting in God to fulfill his will (cf. *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*).

Give thanks when asking

Phil 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, *through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God*. NET

Note: "The Lord's Prayer" – the prayer Jesus gave as an example

Matt 6:9–13 [Jesus:] So *pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored,* [10]*may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* [11]*Give us today our daily bread,* [12]*and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors.* [13]*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* NET

In v. 10, "your will be done" is speaking of people acting in accordance with God's will and/or the fulfillment of God's plans for the world. Note that the conclusion of "The Lord's Prayer" as it is often prayed in church – "for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen" – is contained at the end of this passage in some manuscripts.

e) Epilogue: God's Response to Requests

Again, much of the teaching in the previous sections is very pertinent to the theme of this section – because for prayer to be answered, it should be presented appropriately.

God answers those who obey and please him . . .

1Jn 3:21–22 [John, to believers:] Dear friends, *if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God,* [22]*and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him.* NET

The clause "if our conscience does not condemn us" (v. 21) refers to having a clear conscience before God, from obeying and pleasing him (v. 22b).

. . . God does not listen to those who do evil rather than good

Job 35:12–13 *Then they* [the wicked] *cry out – but he does not answer – because of the arrogance of the wicked.* [13]*Surely it is an empty cry – God does not hear it; the Almighty does not take notice of it.* NET

Ps 66:18 [A psalmist:] *If I had harbored sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* NET

God grants anything we ask that is in accordance with his will . . .

1Jn 5:14–15 [John, to believers:] And this is the confidence that we have before him: that *whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* [15]*And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.* NET

. . . Further verses regarding prayer and God's will

Luke 22:41–42 He [Jesus] went away from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and *prayed,* [42]*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but yours be done."* NET

> Jesus requested that his impending suffering be avoided – if this was in God's will. The request was not in accordance with God's will and so was not granted – in line with Jesus' qualification that it only be granted if it was God's will.

Rom 1:9b–10 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN BELIEVERS:] I mention you [10]always in my prayers, *asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.* ESV

> Paul appears to pray that his request be in accordance with God's will or, similarly, be achieved through God's will.

Sometimes God may not appear to answer, or does not answer immediately

Ps 22:1–2 [DAVID:] *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? I groan in prayer, but help seems far away.* [2]*My God, I cry out during the day, but you do not answer, and during the night my prayers do not let up.* NET

Hab 1:2 [HABAKKUK:] *How long, LORD, must I cry for help? But you do not listen! I call out to you, "Violence!" But you do not intervene!* NET

Sometimes God and Jesus Christ refuse requests

Deut 3:23–26 Moreover, at that time I [Moses] pleaded with the LORD, [24]"O, Lord GOD, you have begun to show me your greatness and strength. (What god in heaven or earth can rival your works and mighty deeds?) [25]*Let me please cross over to see the good land on the other side of the Jordan River – this good hill country and the Lebanon!"* [26]*But the LORD was angry at me because of you and would not listen to me. Instead, he said to me, "Enough of that! Do not speak to me anymore about this matter.* NET

2Cor 12:7b–9 [PAUL:] Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me – so that I would not become arrogant. [8]*I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me.* [9]*But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. NET

Examples and affirmation of God answering prayer

Acts 12:5–7, 11 So Peter was kept in prison, but *those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him.* [6]On that very night before Herod was going to bring him out for trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. [7]*Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the prison cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly!" And the chains fell off Peter's wrists. …* [11]*When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen."* NET

Acts 28:8 His [Publius'] father was in bed, sick with fever and stomach trouble, and Paul went to visit him. *Paul healed the man by praying* and placing his hands on him. CEV

Ps 65:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You answer our prayers by performing awesome acts of deliverance, O God, our savior.* All the ends of the earth trust in you, as well as those living across the wide seas. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 25

Exalting God

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I. Instructions

We exalt God by doing such things as glorifying, honoring, praising and thanking him. Exalting God is a very common theme in the Bible and should also be a prominent part of our lives. In fact the Bible tells us to praise and thank God constantly. The significance of exalting God is underlined by the first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism which says: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

a) Glorify and Honor God

Glorify God, giving glory to him

Ps 22:23 All who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, *glorify him!* Stand in awe of him, all you descendants of Israel. GW

Isa 24:15 [ISAIAH:] Therefore in the east *give glory to the LORD*; in the coastlands of the sea, *give glory to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel*. ESV

Honor God

Isa 26:13 LORD, our God, other masters besides you have ruled us, but *we honor only you*. NCV™

Glorify and honor God by thanksgiving and praise

Ps 69:30 [DAVID:] I will praise God in a song and will *honor him by giving thanks*. NCV™

Dan 4:34b [DANIEL:] Then *I gave praise to the Most High God; I gave honor and glory to him who lives forever*. God's rule is forever, and his kingdom continues for all time. NCV™

Glorify God by how you live . . .

1Cor 10:31 So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do everything for the glory of God*. NET

God's people are identified with him and so their lives are in a sense a reflection on God. Thus they should seek to do everything in a way that will bring glory to God.

. . . Glorify and honor God by good deeds and bearing fruit

Prov 14:31 Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker, but *whoever is kind to the needy honors God*. NCV™

John 15:8 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* ESV

Here "fruit" appears to refer to – or at least be applicable to – the product of work done for God's kingdom. By bearing such good "fruit" we bring glory to God, showing ourselves to be disciples of the One sent by him.

Not glorifying and honoring God has detrimental outcomes

Rom 1:21 For *although they* [wicked people] *knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened*. NET

Mal 2:2a *If you do not listen and take seriously the need to honor my name," says the LORD who rules over all, "I will send judgment on you and turn your blessings into curses …* NET

b) Do Not Dishonor God

Do not blaspheme God

Ex 22:28 *You must not blaspheme God* or curse the ruler of your people. NET

Blaspheming God is to speak – or act – in a way that detracts from the honor of God.

Do not by your actions bring disgrace on God . . .

Prov 30:9b [AGUR:] But if I am poor, I might *steal and bring disgrace on my God*. GNT

By ungodly actions God's people can bring disgrace on God, dishonoring him. This is particularly so when the actions are known to other people, as it publicly reflects badly on God (cf. Ezek 36:19–20) as the one to whom his people belong.

. . . Live a life worthy of God

1Thes 2:12 [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] We comforted and encouraged you, urging you to *live in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory*. ISV

Do not show disrespect for things of God

Lev 22:2b, 15 [God, to Moses:] I am the Lord God, and *I demand that you honor my holy name by showing proper respect for the offerings brought to me by the people of Israel ... [15]I warn you not to treat lightly the offerings that are brought by the people of Israel.* CEV

Additionally, do not treat God with contempt . . .

Num 14:11, 23 *The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt?* How long will they refuse to trust me in spite of all the miraculous signs I have done among them? ... [23]*None of those who treat me with contempt will see it!* GW

To treat God with contempt – or to scoff at God (as per the following subsection) – is demeaning and dishonoring to God. Note that v. 23 refers to not seeing the promised land.

. . . and do not scoff at God

2Chr 36:16 But *they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people*, until there was no remedy. ESV

Note: We must treat God as holy

Isa 8:13 But *the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy*. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ESV

c) Praise and Thank God

Praise God

Ps 146:1 *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!* NET

Calls for all things everywhere to praise God

Ps 103:22 *Praise the Lord, all that he has made, in all the regions of his kingdom!* Praise the Lord, O my soul! NET

Ps 150:6 *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!* Praise the Lord! NET

Praise God constantly

Heb 13:15 Through him [Jesus Christ] then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. NET

Ps 34:1 [David:] *I will praise the Lord at all times; my mouth will continually praise him.* NET

Praise God forever

Ps 145:1–2 [David, to God:] I praise your greatness, my God the King; *I will praise you forever and ever. [2]I will praise you every day; I will praise you forever and ever.* NCV™

Give thanks to God

Ps 100:4 *Enter the temple gates with thanksgiving*, go into its courts with praise. *Give thanks to him* and praise him. GNT

As with praising God, thanking God for things exalts him (the subject of this chapter) for by doing so we attribute praiseworthy things to him.

Give thanks to God always

Eph 5:20 *Always give thanks to God the Father for everything*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. NCV™

1Thes 5:16–18 [Paul, to believers:] Rejoice always, [17]pray without ceasing, [18]*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*. ESV

Blessings of giving praise and thanks to God

Ps 89:15–16a [Ethan, to God:] *Blessed are the people who know how to praise you. They walk in the light of your presence, O Lord. [16]They find joy in your name all day long.* GW

Ps 50:14–15 *Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and perform your vows to the Most High, [15]*and call upon me* [God] *in the day of trouble; I will deliver you*, and you shall glorify me. ESV

d) How to Give Praise and Thanks (I): General

In righteousness

Ps 33:1 *Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.* ESV

For our praise and thanksgiving to be valid and acceptable to God, it is critical that we be "righteous" and "upright", striving to live righteous lives.

Wholeheartedly

Ps 9:1 [DAVID:] *I will thank the LORD with all my heart!* I will tell about all your amazing deeds! NET

Through prayer

Dan 6:10b In the same way that he [Daniel] had always done, *he knelt down in prayer three times a day, giving thanks to God*. CEV

In singing . . .

Ps 47:6–7 *Sing praises to God. Sing praises. Sing praises to our King. Sing praises.* [7]God is King of all the earth, so *sing a song of praise to him*. NCV™

Ps 28:7 [DAVID:] The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I received help. My heart exalts, and *I give thanks to him with my song*. ISV

. . . along with making music

2Chr 5:13a *The singers were accompanied in perfect harmony by trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments, as they praised the LORD, singing: "Praise the LORD, because he is good, And his love is eternal."* GNT

With dancing

Ps 149:3 *Let them praise his name with dancing!* Let them sing praises to him to the accompaniment of the tambourine and harp! NET

With lifting up of hands

Ps 134:2 *Lift your hands toward the sanctuary and praise the LORD!* NET

Loudly and with shouts

2Chr 20:19 Then some Levites, from the Kohathites and Korahites, got up and *loudly praised the LORD God of Israel*. NET

Ezra 3:11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And *all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD*, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ESV

By making offerings

Ps 107:22 *Let them present thank offerings*, and loudly proclaim what he has done! NET

The OT practices of making formal offerings as expressions of thanksgiving, are paralleled by the giving of our resources to God and his work as an expression of our thankfulness for his goodness.

Note: Give praise and thanks to God with and among other people

Ps 34:3 *Magnify the LORD with me! Let's praise his name together!* NET

Ps 35:18 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Then *I will give you thanks in the great assembly; I will praise you before a large crowd of people!* NET

As well as doing so by ourselves, we should also give praise and thanks to God with and among other people. Note that the things spoken of in the preceding subsections are applicable to praising and thanking God both individually and with others.

e) How to Give Praise and Thanks (II): Rejoicing

To rejoice is to be glad or joyful. By focusing on God, his promises and the wonderful things he has done – in the world, for others and for ourselves (including his many blessings) – we cannot help but be filled with joy, and so we rejoice. This is typically done in conjunction with praising and thanking God.

Rejoice in God

Ps 32:11 *Rejoice in the* LORD *and be happy,* you who are godly! *Shout for joy,* all you who are morally upright! NET

Phil 3:1a [PAUL:] Finally, my brothers and sisters, *rejoice in the Lord!* NET

Note that rather than meaning rejoice in or because of the Lord (Jesus), here "rejoice in the Lord" (cf. 4:4 ⇩) probably more specifically means rejoice "in your union with the Lord" (GNT).

Rejoice in God and Jesus Christ always

Ps 89:16 [ETHAN, SPEAKING TO GOD OF WORSHIPERS:] *They rejoice in your name all day long,* and are vindicated by your justice. NET

Phil 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!* NET

Rejoice when giving praise and thanks to God

Ps 68:4 *Sing to God! Sing praises to his name! Exalt the one who rides on the clouds!* For the LORD is his name! *Rejoice before him!* NET

Ps 97:12 You godly ones, *rejoice in the* LORD*! Give thanks to his holy name.* NET

Be glad and joyful when praising and thanking God

2Chr 29:30b So *they sang praises with gladness,* and they bowed their heads and worshiped. NKJV

Col 1:11b–12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And *with joy give thanks to the Father,* who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light. GNT

Joy should characterize singing and shouting to God

1Chr 15:16 David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint some of their relatives as musicians; they were to play various instruments, including stringed instruments and cymbals, and to *sing loudly and joyfully.* NET

Ps 33:3 Sing a new song to him, play the harp with skill, and *shout for joy!* GNT

Note: Delight in God and in things of God

Ps 37:4 *Delight yourself in the* LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ESV

Ps 119:47 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I will find delight in your commands,* which I love. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Reasons to Exalt God

Not only does the Bible tell us to persistently exalt God, it is bulging with good reasons for doing so. Generally speaking, these compelling reasons, or things for which to exalt God, concern what God is like and what he does.

a) Aspects of God's Being

God's glory

Ezek 3:12b *"Praise the glory of the LORD in heaven above!"* GNT

God's eternity

1Tim 1:17 *Now to the eternal king, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever! Amen.* NET

God's greatness

Deut 32:3b *Praise God because he is great!* NCV™

Ps 150:2b *Praise him for his surpassing greatness!* NET

God's power

Ps 21:13 *Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.* ESV

Ps 150:2a *Praise him for his mighty acts!* NET

God's wisdom and knowledge

Rom 11:33–34, 36b *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways! 34For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? ... 36... To him be glory forever! Amen.* NET

God's "name"

Ps 29:2a *Give to the LORD the glory his name deserves.* GW

Note that references to God's "name" are synonymous with God himself, inclusive of all that he is and signifies.

b) Aspects of God's Character

God's holiness

Ps 99:9 *Praise the LORD our God! Worship on his holy hill, for the LORD our God is holy!* NET

God's holiness – in which he is set apart from all others in his purity and righteousness – should evoke awe, praise and worship.

God's love . . .

Ps 63:3 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.* ESV

Ps 107:8 *Let them give thanks to the LORD for his loyal love*, and for the amazing things he has done for people! NET

. . . along with God's faithfulness

Ps 57:9–10 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *I will give you thanks before the nations, O Master! I will sing praises to you before foreigners! 10For your loyal love extends beyond the sky, and your faithfulness reaches the clouds.* NET

God's righteousness and justness

Ps 7:17 *I will give thanks to the LORD for his righteousness.* I will make music to praise the name of the LORD Most High. GW

Dan 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, *praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for all his deeds are right and his ways are just*. He is able to bring down those who live in pride. NET

God's mercy

Rom 15:9a People who are not Jewish *praise God for his mercy* as well. GW

2Cor 1:3 *Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort.* CEV

God's goodness

Ps 136:1 *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good*, for his loyal love endures. NET

c) What God Does in the World

God's deeds in general

Ps 72:18 *The LORD God, the God of Israel, deserves praise! He alone accomplishes amazing things!* NET

Ps 86:8–10 None can compare to you among the gods, O Lord! *Your exploits are incomparable!* [9]*All the nations, whom you created, will come and worship you, O Lord. They will honor your name.* [10]*For you are great and do amazing things.* You alone are God. NET

God's creative work

Rev 4:11 *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, since you created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created!"* NET

God's provision of water and food

Ps 147:7–9 *Offer to the LORD a song of thanks! Sing praises to our God to the accompaniment of a harp!* [8]*He covers the sky with clouds, provides the earth with rain, and causes grass to grow on the hillsides.* [9]*He gives food to the animals, and to the young ravens when they chirp.* NET

Mark 8:7 They [the disciples] also had *a few small fish. After giving thanks for these*, he [Jesus] told them to serve these as well. NET

God's reign

1Chr 29:11–13 [DAVID:] O LORD, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and *sovereign over all the sky and earth! You have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all.* [12]*You are the source of wealth and honor; you rule over all. You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all.* [13]*Now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your majestic name!* NET

Rev 19:6 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then I heard what sounded like the voice of a vast throng, like the roar of many waters and like loud crashes of thunder. They were *shouting: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All-Powerful, reigns!* NET

"Hallelujah" is a call to praise God, often used itself as an expression of praise to God.

God's word . . .

Ps 56:10–11a [DAVID:] In *God, whose word I praise*, in *the LORD, whose word I praise*, [11]in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. ESV

. . . and the spreading of the gospel

Acts 21:19–20a When Paul had greeted them, *he began to explain in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.* [20]*When they heard this, they praised God*. NET

God's judgments

Rev 14:7 He [an angel] declared in a loud voice: "Fear God and *give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived*, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!" NET

Rev 19:1–2a [JOHN:] After these things I heard what sounded like the loud voice of a vast throng in heaven, saying, *"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,* [2]*because his judgments are true and just.* NET

d) What God Does for His People

God's great deeds for his people

Deut 10:21 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.* ESV

Joel 2:20–21, 26 [JOEL:] *He has done great things!* [21]Land, do not be afraid. *Be glad and rejoice. The LORD has done great things! ...* [26]*You will have plenty to eat, and you will be full. You will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has performed miracles for you. My people will never be ashamed again.* GW

God's salvation through Jesus Christ and the associated blessings . . .

Luke 1:68–69 *Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to save his people.* [69]*Our God has given us a mighty Savior from the family of David his servant.* CEV

Eph 1:3 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world*. NCV™

The phrase "in the heavenly world" may be indicating that the blessings are ones that we will experience in the afterlife. Alternatively, the phrase is possibly emphasizing the heavenly and eternal dimension of spiritual blessings that we have now.

. . . in which we should rejoice

1Pet 1:8–9 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but *you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,* [9]*because you are attaining the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls*. NET

God's deliverance from difficulties . . .

Ps 54:6b–7 [DAVID:] *I will thank you, LORD, because you are good.* [7]*You have saved me from all my troubles*, and I have seen my enemies defeated. NCV™

. . . in which we should rejoice

Isa 25:9 At that time they [God's people at the end of the age] will say, "Look, here is our God! We waited for him and he delivered us. Here is the LORD! We waited for him. *Let's rejoice and celebrate his deliverance!*" NET

God's strength for his people

Ps 68:35 You are awe–inspiring, O God, as you emerge from your holy temple! *It is the God of Israel who gives the people power and strength. God deserves praise!* NET

Further things that God does for his people

Ps 16:7 [DAVID:] *I will praise the LORD who guides me*; yes, during the night I reflect and learn. NET

Ps 103:2–5 [DAVID:] *Praise the LORD, O my soul! Do not forget all his kind deeds!* [3]*He is the one who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases,* [4]*who delivers your life from the Pit, who crowns you with his loyal love and compassion,* [5]*who satisfies your life with good things, so your youth is renewed like an eagle's.* NET

e) Epilogue: God's Vast Blessing of His People

The previous section spoke of some of the wonderful things that God does or has done for his people – in the context of exalting God. This section emphasizes the vastness of God's blessing of his people. The verses in this section generally do not explicitly speak of exalting God because of his vast blessings, but obviously they are readily applicable and adaptable to doing so.

God and Jesus Christ greatly bless their people

Mal 3:10 "Bring the entire tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. So, put me to the test in this right now," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies, "and *see if I won't throw open the windows of heaven for you and pour out on you blessing without measure*. ISV

Rom 10:12 For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for *the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him*. NET

God does many great things for his people

Judg 2:7 The people worshiped the LORD throughout Joshua's lifetime and as long as the elderly men who outlived him remained alive. These men had witnessed *all the great things the LORD had done for Israel*. NET

God blesses his people in many ways

Mark 10:29–30 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel [30]who will not *receive in this age a hundred times as much – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields*, all with persecutions – *and in the age to come, eternal life.* NET

The "houses" and "lands" promised in this present age (v. 30) are quite unlikely to be speaking of accumulated property. More likely the promises in v. 30 have in view what Christians have within the community of believers. There God's people have

many new intimate relationships and a share in all that belongs to the fellowship of believers.

God's people lack no good thing

Ps 34:9–10 Remain loyal to the LORD, you chosen people of his, for *his loyal followers lack nothing!* [10]Even young lions sometimes lack food and are hungry, but *those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.* NET

God's people lack nothing of any real consequence.

Ultimately, God gives his people all things

1Cor 3:21–23 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] So then, no more boasting about mere mortals! *For everything belongs to you,* [22]*whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. Everything belongs to you,* [23]and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. NET

Paul may well have in mind here that all things belong to God's people because of their relationship with Jesus Christ (v. 23). In this relationship they share in all that belongs to Christ, to whom God has given everything. This reality will be more tangible in the life to come.

Note: God gives his people blessings that last

Rom 11:29 For *the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.* NET

Heb 10:34 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] For in fact you shared the sufferings of those in prison, and you accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because *you knew that you certainly had a better and lasting possession.* NET

The "better and lasting possession" presumably has primarily in view our salvation.

Pray for persecuted Christians

Unit F

Church Life

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CHAPTER 26

Being One Body

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I. General

The New Testament deals extensively with how we should relate to other Christians and with issues vital for the life of the church. Amongst the most prominent themes are the need for unity and love. Fellowship is another important concept that we need to grasp, with it being involved in a number of aspects of church life.

a) The Church as One Body

See also:

- *c) God's People Are One Body 'in' Jesus Christ*, p. 174

God's people form local groups, called churches

Gal 1:2b, 22 [Paul:] To *the churches in Galatia*. ... [22]*The churches of Christ in Judea* didn't know me personally. GW

The term "church" refers to a community of believers. As such it can be used of small house groups as well as local church congregations. Additionally it can be used more generally of God's people as a whole – the worldwide church.

As per the first two uses, believers meet and function together in local community groups (as parts of God's people as a whole). It is this localized context that is generally spoken of in this and the following chapters in Part F. Church Life.

The many church members form one body – the body of Christ

1Cor 12:12, 27 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] *A person's body is only one thing, but it has many parts. Though there are many parts to a body, all those parts make only one body. Christ is like that also. ...* [27]*Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body.* NCV™

The phrase "the body of Christ" figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people. Moreover, it points to the unity Christ's people have together in their relationship with him. While the worldwide church is the whole "body of Christ", each local church is a form of "the body of Christ". And in each case the many members together make one body.

As one body, church members meet together

Rom 16:5a [Paul:] Also, greet for me *the church that meets at their house*. NCV™

Heb 10:25a [The writer, to believers:] *Let us not give up the habit of meeting together*, as some are doing. GNT

Church members function together as one church body

Acts 15:3–4 So *they* [Paul and others] *were sent on their way by the church*, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they were relating at length the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy to all the brothers. [4]When they arrived in Jerusalem, *they were received by the church* and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all the things God had done with them. NET

This passage includes segments which illustrate churches functioning as one body – i.e. as a unit or cohesive community.

The concept represented by the term "church" – often used to translate the Greek word "ekklesia" – involves believers meeting together and functioning as a community or one spiritual body. As such, they worship God together and cohesively further the cause of their head, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they live in relationship with each other, in which they minister to each other.

The church body grows – spiritually and numerically

Eph 4:15–16 [Paul, to the Ephesian church:] But practicing the truth in love, *we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.* [16]*From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love.* NET

Acts 16:5 So *the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.* NET

b) Be in Unison

Be united as one

Acts 4:32 *The group of those who believed were of one heart and mind*, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but everything was held in common. NET

1Cor 1:10 [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH:] I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose*. NET

In the last clause, Paul urges his readers to be united by having the same Christ-centered thinking and objective/s.

Live in peace with each other

1Thes 5:13b [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA:] *Be at peace among yourselves.* NET

Rom 14:19 [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN ROME:] Therefore, *let's keep on pursuing those things that bring peace* and that lead to building one another up. ISV

Submit to one another

Eph 5:21 [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS:] *Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.* GNT

Avoid foolish arguments and quarreling

2Tim 2:23–24 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Stay away from foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they grow into quarrels.* [24]*And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel* but must be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and patient. NCV™

Sometimes disputes and differences may be necessary

1Cor 11:18–19 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] For in the first place, *when you come together as a church I hear there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.* [19]*For there must in fact be divisions among you, so that those of you who are approved may be evident.* NET

Where there is sin or false beliefs in the church, differences will be needed so that those who act and believe in accordance with God's will may distinguish themselves from those who do not (v. 19). It is in fact necessary for believers to take a stand against sin and false beliefs in the church.

Note: Have any internal legal disputes judged by people of God

1Cor 6:1–2, 6–7 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] *When any of you has a legal dispute with another, does he dare go to court before the unrighteous rather than before the saints?* [2]*Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent to settle trivial suits? …* [6]*Instead, does a Christian sue a Christian, and do this before unbelievers?* [7]*The fact that you have lawsuits among yourselves demonstrates that you have already been defeated. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?* NET

With his first statement in v. 7, Paul appears to refer to spiritual failure, either: in seeking retribution, as opposed to being meek and forgiving; or in being at odds with a fellow believer/s, as opposed to being unified as parts of the body of Christ.

c) Be in Fellowship

The concept of "fellowship" involves sharing and participating in a partnership concerning a mutual interest or purpose, which for believers is their common faith and life in Christ. This is shown in the Greek word translated as "fellowship" ("koinonia") which emphasizes participation. Believers participate in Christ and church activities, and in each other's lives.

Note that a number of the verses in this section show that fellowship occurs amongst believers across the worldwide church, in addition to the local church context.

Have fellowship together . . .

Acts 2:42 *They* [the believers] *were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. NET

. . . Believers have fellowship collectively with God and Jesus Christ

1Jn 1:3 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so *that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ)*. NET

The fellowship believers have together is not only based on their mutual relationship in Jesus Christ, but is also a fellowship with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Participate together in church activities

Acts 1:14 *They* [the disciples] *gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.* GNT

1Cor 16:15b–16 [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH:] I urge you [16]also to submit to people like this, and to *everyone who cooperates in the work and labors hard*. NET

Church members should participate together in God's work, cooperating with each other.

Share together in the sufferings that come because of Jesus Christ

2Tim 1:8 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] So *never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord* or be ashamed of me, his prisoner. Instead, by God's power, *join me in suffering for the sake of the Good News.* GW

Share together in the joy that comes in being of the church

John 4:36 The one who reaps receives pay and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that *the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together*. NET

Those who work together in bringing people to faith, share together in much joy over the fruits of their labor.

Share in each other's troubles and joy

Rom 12:15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* NET

Fellow believers may well be primarily in view here.

Keep in touch about each other's welfare – and keep the others informed of your own

Phil 2:19 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH:] Now I hope in the Lord Jesus *to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be encouraged by hearing news about you*. NET

Eph 6:21–22 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH:] Tychicus, my dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, *will make everything known to you, so that you too may know about my circumstances, how I am doing. [22]I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know our circumstances* and that he may encourage your hearts. NET

Although Paul was not actually a member of the Philippian and Ephesian churches, he was effectively a leader of them and very much a part of them. As such these verses illustrate how church members should be aware of each other's welfare – and keep the others informed of their own.

Note: Believers share together in spiritual blessings

1Cor 9:23 [PAUL:] I do it all for the sake of *the gospel, that I may share with them* [other believers] *in its blessings*. ESV

Jude 1:3 [JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] My dear friends, I was doing my best to write to you about *the salvation we share in common*, when I felt the need of writing at once to encourage you to fight on for the faith which once and for all God has given to his people. GNT

d) Love Each Other (I): General

See also:

- *31. Love*, p. 339

Love one another

1Jn 3:11, 23 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that *we should love one another*. ... [23]And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and *love one another, just as he has commanded us*. ESV

Love one another more and more

Phil 1:9 [Paul, to believers:] And it is my prayer *that your love may abound more and more*, with knowledge and all discernment, ... ESV

Loving other Christians is indicative of being of God and Jesus Christ . . .

John 13:34–35 [Jesus, to his disciples:] "I give you a new commandment – to love one another. *Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* [35]*Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.*" NET

1Jn 4:7, 12, 16b [John, to believers:] Beloved, *let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God*. ... [12]No one has ever seen God; *if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.* ... [16]*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* ESV

> Love is the essence of God's nature – "God is love" (v. 16; cf. v. 8). Everyone who loves exhibits God's nature, demonstrating that they have been "born of God" (v. 7b). In addition, loving one another shows that we know God (v. 7), and that we live in God and he lives in us (vv. 12, 16b).

. . . Not loving other Christians has negative implications

1Jn 3:10, 14 [John, to believers:] *This is how God's children and the devil's children are distinguished. No person who fails to practice righteousness and to love his brother is from God.* ... [14]We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another. *The person who does not love remains in death.* ISV

Love is vital for Christian service and living

2Pet 1:7–8 [Peter, to believers:] ... to your godliness add Christian affection; and to your Christian affection *add love.* [8]*These are the qualities you need, and if you have them in abundance, they will make you active and effective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* GNT

1Thes 5:8 [Paul, to believers:] But since we are of the day, *we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of faith and love* and as a helmet our hope for salvation. NET

> This figuratively illustrates that love – along with faith and hope – provides significant spiritual protection for the believer, helping them to live godly lives.

Further blessings of loving each other

Col 2:2 [Paul, referring to people he sought to help in their faith:] *I want them to be strengthened and joined together with love so that they may be rich in their understanding. This leads to their knowing fully God's secret, that is, Christ himself.* NCV™

> As Christians exist together united in love, they increasingly experience and comprehend spiritual blessings and truths.

1Jn 4:17–18 [John, to believers:] By this *love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because just as Jesus is, so also are we in this world.* [18]*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears punishment has not been perfected in love.* NET

> This is speaking of having the love that comes from God, expressed in loving others. Such love, an expression and extension of God's love, makes judgment from him inconceivable and so annuls any fear of judgment. Conversely, whoever fears has "not really learned to love" (CEV, v. 18b); they do not have perfect love (cf. GNT, NCV, NLT).

e) Love Each Other (II): How

See also:

- *II. Caring for the Body*, p. 289
- *W*, p. 340

Love is expressed with actions

1Jn 3:17–18 [John, to believers:] *Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person.* [18]*My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring.* NCV™

Love each other as Jesus Christ loved us, even laying down his life

John 15:12–13 [Jesus, to his disciples:] My commandment is this – to *love one another just as I have loved you.* [13]*No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends.* NET

> Jesus disciples were to love each other as he had loved them, a love which he would show to be unsurpassed by laying down his life for them.

Love each other sincerely and earnestly

1Pet 1:22 [Peter, to believers:] Now that by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves and have come to *have a sincere love for your fellow-believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart.* GNT

Love each other as brothers and sisters

Heb 13:1 *Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.* NCV™

Keep each other in your hearts . . .

Phil 1:7 [Paul, to the Philippian church:] For it is right for me to think this about all of you, because *I have you in my heart*, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel all of you became partners in God's grace together with me. NET

> When Paul talks of having others in his heart, he implies that they are an integral part of himself and his consciousness.

. . . Long for each other

Phil 4:1 [Paul, to the Philippian church:] So then, *my brothers and sisters, dear friends whom I long to see*, my joy and crown, stand in the Lord in this way, my dear friends! NET

Note: Obedience to God and other aspects of the faith are essential for love

1Jn 5:2 *This is how we know that we love God's children: we love God and keep his commandments.* ISV

1Tim 1:5 [Paul:] But the aim of our instruction is *love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith*. NET

II. Caring for the Body

See also:

- *d) Caring for Church Members* [Leaders], p. 328

The care that church members ought to show each other should be one of the defining characteristics of every church, evidencing Christian love. This care should include both spiritual and practical care, with the former largely involving prayer and encouragement.

a) Pray for Each Other (I): General

Pray earnestly for other Christians

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but *those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him*. NET

Pray constantly for other Christians

Eph 6:18 *Never stop praying, especially for others.* Always pray by the power of the Spirit. *Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.* CEV

Rom 1:9–10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For God, whom I serve in my spirit by preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how *constantly I mention you* [10]*in my prayers at all times*, asking that somehow by God's will I may at last succeed in coming to you. ISV

Pray for those facing persecution

2Thes 3:2 [PAUL:] *Pray also that God will rescue us from wicked and evil people*; for not everyone believes the message. GNT

Phil 1:18b–19 [PAUL:] Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, [19]for I know that *this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers* and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. NET

Paul speaks of the Philippians' prayers for him while he was imprisoned because of his work for God's kingdom (cf. v. 17).

Pray for those spreading the gospel

2Thes 3:1 [PAUL:] Finally, our brothers and sisters, *pray for us, that the Lord's message may continue to spread rapidly and be received with honor*, just as it was among you. GNT

Always thank God for other Christians because of their faith and love

Eph 1:15–16 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS:] For this reason, *because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,* [16]*I do not cease to give thanks for you* when I remember you in my prayers. NET

Thank God because of the service of other Christians

Phil 1:3–5 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS:] *I thank my God for you every time I think of you;* [4]*and every time I pray for you all, I pray with joy* [5]*because of the way in which you have helped me in the work of the gospel from the very first day until now.* GNT

b) Pray for Each Other (II): What to Ask

Ask that other believers will live as God wants

2Cor 13:7 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong*, not so that we may appear to have passed the test, but so *that you may do what is right* even if we may appear to have failed the test. NET

Ask God to forgive them when they do sin

Num 14:19–20 [MOSES, TO GOD:] *Please forgive the iniquity of this people according to your great loyal love, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now."* [20]Then the LORD said, "I have forgiven them as you asked. NET

Pray for their spiritual growth

Phil 1:9–11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And *I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight* [10]*so that*

you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, [11]*filled with the fruit of righteousness* that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. NET

The phrase "the fruit of righteousness" (v. 11a) could refer to either good deeds (cf. CEV, NCV) or to righteous qualities (cf. GNT). The concept of being "filled with the fruit" seems to favour the second interpretation.

Pray for them in their work for the kingdom, asking God to aid them in the work

Rom 15:30a [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Brothers and sisters, I beg you to *help me in my work by praying to God for me*. NCV™

2Thes 1:11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God chose you, and we keep praying that God will make you worthy of being his people. *We pray for God's power to help you do all the good things that you hope to do and that your faith makes you want to do.* CEV

Ask God to help and take care of them

1Ki 8:52 [SOLOMON, TO GOD:] *May you be attentive to your servant's and your people Israel's requests for help and may you respond to all their prayers to you.* NET

Ps 5:11b [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Protect those who love you;* because of you they are truly happy. GNT

c) Encourage Each Other

The Hebrew and Greek words translated "encourage" often imply meanings such as "strengthen", "exhort" and "comfort". Believers are to strengthen each other, particularly in regard to faith and work for the kingdom; they are to exhort each other to press on and to live as God wants; and they are to comfort each other in difficult circumstances.

Encourage each other

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, *let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer*. GNT

Strengthen each other

1Sam 23:16 And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and *strengthened his hand in God*. ESV

Jonathan helped David find strength in God.

Encourage and strengthen each other by what you say

2Chr 32:6–8 He [Hezekiah] appointed military officers over the army and assembled them in the square at the city gate. *He encouraged them, saying,* [7]*"Be strong and brave! Don't be afraid and don't panic because of the king of Assyria and this huge army that is with him! We have with us one who is stronger than those who are with him.* [8]*He has with him mere human strength, but the LORD our God is with us to help us and fight our battles!" The army was encouraged by the words of King Hezekiah of Judah.* NET

Eph 4:29 *When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you.* NCV™

Encourage others to continue in God's grace

Acts 13:43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, *urged them to continue in the grace of God*. ESV

Continuing in God's grace primarily involves remaining true to God and holding to the faith. As such one remains under God's grace, staying right with him (just as one received God's grace in originally being made right with him). It also encompasses relying on God's grace for God to meet one's needs, notably spiritual needs.

Encourage each other by what you do . . .

Col 2:1–2 [PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS IN COLOSSE:] *I want you to know what a struggle I am going through for you, for God's people at Laodicea, and for all of those followers who have never met me.* [2]*I do it to encourage them.* Then as their hearts are joined together in love, they will be wonderfully blessed with complete understanding. And they will truly know Christ. CEV

. . . Do not do anything that will cause another to "stumble"

Rom 14:13b [Paul, to believers:] Instead, *you should decide never to do anything that would make another stumble or fall into sin*. GNT

Comfort each other

2Cor 1:4 He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can *share that same comfort with others in trouble*. CEV

Comfort those in need by visiting them

John 11:18–19 Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, [19]and *many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died*. CEV

d) Help Each Other

Be concerned for each other

1Cor 12:24b–25 [Paul, speaking of the church body:] Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, [25]so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may *have mutual concern for one another*. NET

Consequently, help each other

Gal 6:2 *Carry one another's burdens*, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. NET

Heb 6:10 God is always fair. He will remember *how you helped his people in the past and how you are still helping them*. You belong to God, and he won't forget the love you have shown his people. CEV

Meet each other's needs . . .

2Cor 9:12 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] For *this service you perform* not only *meets the needs of God's people*, but also produces an outpouring of gratitude to God. GNT

. . . Share what you have with those in need

Rom 12:13 *Share what you have with God's people who are in need.* Be hospitable. GW

Acts 2:44–45 All who believed were together and *held everything in common, [45]and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need*. NET

Help others who are doing God's work

Rom 16:2 [Paul, speaking to the Roman church about Phoebe:] I ask you to accept her in the Lord in the way God's people should. *Help her with anything she needs, because she has helped me and many other people also.* NCV™

2Tim 1:16–18 [Paul, to Timothy:] May the Lord grant mercy to the family of Onesiphorus, because *he often refreshed me* and was not ashamed of my imprisonment. [17]But when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me. [18]May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day! And you know very well *all the ways he served me* in Ephesus. NET

Note: What one does for another Christian, one does for Jesus Christ

Matt 25:35–40 [Jesus Christ, to righteous people on judgment day:] For *I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, [36]I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' [37]Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? [38]When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? [39]When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' [40]And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.'* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 27

Worshiping God

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I. General

See also:

- *25. Exalting God*, p. 271
- *28. Serving God*, p. 303

Worshiping God is one of the most important and fundamental duties of believers. It involves honoring him by acknowledging his worthiness, including his divine characteristics and wondrous deeds. This is done through such things as praise and thanksgiving, offered with adoration and reverence.

It is also done through offering our resources and even ourselves to God. The former is born out in the second half of this chapter. The latter is done largely through serving God. As such the following chapter on serving God is also pertinent to worshiping him.

a) Worship God

We must worship God

Ps 29:2 Honor the wonderful name of the LORD, and *worship the LORD most holy and glorious*. CEV

Worship God alone – do not worship anything or anyone else

Matt 4:8–10 Again, the devil took him [Jesus] to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. [9]And *he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me." [10]Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: 'You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"* NET

Dan 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their God has sent his angel and saved his servants from the fire! These three men trusted their God and refused to obey my command. *They were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god other than their own.* NCV™

Worship God for his glory and sovereignty

Ps 96:6–10a *Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.* [7]*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!* [8]*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!* [9]*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!* [10]*Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!* ESV

"Ascribe" (cf. vv. 7, 8) means "attribute" or "impute". Verse 9a appears to indicate that we should worship God being mindful of or in view of "all his holy splendor" (NLT).

Worship God for his marvelous deeds – including his creation of everything

Ps 86:9–10 All the nations, whom you created, *will come and worship you, O LORD. They will honor your name.* [10]*For you are great and do amazing things.* You alone are God. NET

Rev 14:7 He [an angel] declared in a loud voice: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and *worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!*" NET

Worship God because of his care of his people

Ex 4:31b *They bowed down and worshiped the Lord because they knew that he had seen their suffering and was going to help them.* CEV

b) Worshiping before God

Worship before God, in his presence

1Sam 1:19a They rose early in the morning and *worshiped before the LORD*; then they went back to their house at Ramah. ESV

Like the Israelites in the OT were to worship before God at the tabernacle and later the temple – which signified his presence amongst them – believers are to worship before God, being conscious of his presence. But they are not restricted as to where they can do so.

Worship God in spirit and by the Holy Spirit

John 4:23–24 But a time is coming – and now is here – when the *true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. [24]*God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.* NET

Phil 3:3a [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] It is we, not they, who have received the true circumcision, for *we worship God by means of his Spirit* and rejoice in our life in union with Christ Jesus. GNT

> To worship "in spirit" (cf. John 4:23–24) is primarily an inward activity, rather than being centered on the performing of rituals (which was such a prominent part of OT worship). It involves one's spirit – and thus one's mind and will. To begin with, the heart and/or conscience of the worshiper must be right before God. Then one must be honest and open in approaching God, and fully focused on God; obviously this needs to be done willingly. Not least, the worshiper must worship by the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil 3:3). This involves being conscious of the Spirit, relying on the Spirit's enablement to commune with God and being open to the Spirit's promptings.

Worship God in reverence and awe . . .

Heb 12:28–29 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus *let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,* [29]*for our God is a consuming fire.* ESV

> The description of God as a "consuming fire" points to his power and preparedness to fierily devour or destroy that which is opposed to him and incompatible with his holiness.

. . . Even bow down before God

Ps 95:6 [A CALL TO FELLOW ISRAELITES:] *Come! Let's bow down and worship! Let's kneel before the LORD, our creator!* NET

> The Hebrew for "bow down" can be translated as "worship", indicative of the fact that bowing down before God signifies and accompanies worship of him. Bowing and falling down (cf. Rev 11:16 below) before God are also signs of submission and humility – and indicate reverence of him. As such they signify reverent worship of God.

Worship God with praise

Gen 24:26–27a Then the man knelt down and *worshipped the LORD.* [27]*He said, "Praise the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has faithfully kept his promise to my master.* GNT

Heb 13:15 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Through him [Christ] then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. NET

Worship God with thanksgiving

Rev 11:16–17 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION OF A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] Then the twenty–four elders who are seated on their thrones before God threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and *worshiped God* [17]*with these words: "We give you thanks, Lord God, the All–Powerful, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and begun to reign.* NET

Worship God through prayer and even with fasting

Luke 2:37 She [Anna] had lived as a widow since then for eighty–four years. She never left the temple, *worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.* NET

> Worship is often done through prayer. Moreover, prayer itself is indicative of worship. Fasting is also used in worship, in part because it sharpens our focus on God in worship and prayer. Additionally, it aids and signifies our earnestness and devotion to God.

c) Worshiping Together (I): General

Worship God together

Neh 8:6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people replied "Amen! Amen!" as they lifted their hands. *Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.* NET

Ps 95:6 *Come! Let's bow down and worship! Let's kneel before the LORD, our creator!* NET

Offer praise and thanksgiving together

Ezra 3:11 *They* [Israelites] *praised the* LORD *and gave thanks as they took turns singing: "The* LORD *is good! His faithful love for Israel will last forever." Everyone started shouting and praising the* LORD because work on the foundation of the temple had begun. CEV

Pray together

Acts 1:14 *They* [the apostles] *gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.* GNT

Repent together for corporate sin

Neh 9:1–3 On the twenty–fourth day of this same month *the Israelites assembled; they were fasting and wearing sackcloth, their heads covered with dust.* [2]Those truly of Israelite descent separated from all the foreigners, standing and *confessing their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.* [3]For one–fourth of the day they stood in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God, and for another fourth *they were confessing their sins and worshiping the* LORD *their God.* NET

When a group of God's people fail him, it is appropriate that they repent together for such sin. Note that in a sense repentance is an aspect of our worship of God or is at least associated with it (v. 3). For repentance is a facet of our devotion to God, reflective of our reverence and adoration for him.

Offerings should be made during collective worship

1Cor 16:2 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] *On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside money as you have been blessed. Save it up so you will not have to collect money after I come.* NCV™

The reference to "the first day of every week" quite possibly has church meetings in view, for regular collections of offerings of such sums of money.

Have order and propriety in collective worship

1Cor 14:40 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] But *everything must be done in a proper and orderly way.* ISV

1Tim 2:8 [PAUL:] So, *I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up their hands in a holy manner, without anger and arguments.* NCV™

d) Worshiping Together (II): OT Feasts and Festivals

See also:

- *A*, p. 93
- *O*, p. 321

Although not observed by Christians, the feasts and festivals given in the OT law for the Israelites to participate in, exemplify the need for God's people to come together to worship God. Additionally, the reasons and regulations for the feasts and festivals contain principles that are relevant to the worship of God in all eras.

The Israelites were to celebrate together three annual festivals or feasts

Deut 16:16a [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Three times a year all your males shall appear before the* LORD *your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths.* ESV

The three annual festivals required all the people – or at least the men – to gather together. These festivals were: the Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread; the Feast of Weeks (also called Pentecost, in the NT); and the Feast of Booths. They were all linked with agricultural seasons, although the first was primarily rooted in God's deliverance from Egypt, the main focus of its celebration.

Celebration of God's deliverance: The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Lev 23:5–6 *The* LORD*'s Passover is on the fourteenth day of the first month, beginning at twilight.* [6]*The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth day of the same month. You will eat bread made without yeast for seven days.* NCV™

The Feast of Unleavened Bread occurred during the month of Abib (March/April). It was preceded by the Passover. The Passover was observed in the evening, on the anniversary of the departure from Egypt. It commemorated God passing over the houses of the Israelites on the night he struck down

the firstborn of Egypt, in attaining the release of the Israelites. The Feast of Unleavened Bread commenced the following day. The name of this feast is derived from the requirement to eat bread made without yeast for seven days, as the Israelites did when they hurriedly prepared to leave Egypt.

Celebration of God's provision: The Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost); . . .

Ex 34:22 *Celebrate the Feast of Weeks when you gather the first grain of the wheat harvest.* NCV™

The Feast of Weeks was celebrated in the month of Sivan (May/June), fifty days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "Pentecost" – the Greek term for this feast – is derived from the number fifty. This feast marked the wheat harvest. It lasted only one day.

. . . and the Feast of Booths

Deut 16:13 *You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress.* ESV

This festival was held in the month of Tishri (September/October), commencing five days after the Day of Atonement (cf. *A*, p. 93) and lasting for seven days. It marked the fruit harvest, including the grapes. It also commemorated the wilderness wanderings, when the people lived in booths (i.e. temporary shelters) – and probably God's provision during that time.

Israel was also to celebrate new moon festivals

Ezek 46:3 *Each Sabbath and each New Moon Festival all the people are also to bow down and worship the LORD in front of the gate.* GNT

The feasts and festivals were celebrations and generally times of rejoicing

Lev 23:41a *You shall celebrate it* [the Feast of Booths] *as a feast to the LORD* for seven days in the year. ESV

Num 10:10 "Also *in the time when you rejoice, such as on your appointed festivals or at the beginnings of your months*, you must blow with your trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings, so that they may become a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God." NET

They included sacred assemblies and days of no regular work

Lev 23:7–8 *On the first day there will be a holy assembly for you; you must not do any regular work.* [8]You must present a gift to the LORD for seven days, and *the seventh day is a holy assembly; you must not do any regular work*. NET

The reference is to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Offerings

Making offerings to God of money and/or goods is an integral part of worshiping God. Moreover, the Bible gives a number of good reasons to give offerings to God. It also gives guidelines on what to give and how to give to God. Additionally, the Bible emphasizes the need for our lives to please God in order for our offerings to be acceptable to him.

Note that this section contains many OT verses speaking of offerings required by the OT law. Some kinds of OT offerings, or sacrifices, were specifically for sin (cf. *Offerings for Atonement for Sinners*, p. 92). These have no current application for Christians as Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for sin once and for all. In contrast, other types of offerings were given for reasons such as thanksgiving to God and for the service of God. These offerings have their parallels in Christian worship offerings today – in the giving of money (and other resources) to God. Moreover, many of the OT regulations concerning these offerings provide reasons for and important principles involved in giving to God that are applicable today.

a) Reasons to Give to God

We are required to give offerings to God

Ps 96:8 Praise the LORD's glorious name; *bring an offering and come into his Temple*. GNT

Ezek 20:40b [GOD, SPEAKING OF/TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] There I will accept them, and *there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings*. ESV

Offerings are an important part of worshiping God

Isa 19:21 And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and *worship with sacrifice and offering,* and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. ESV

Offerings acknowledge God's provision for us . . .

Deut 16:9–10 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] You must count seven weeks; you must begin to count them *from the time you begin to harvest the standing grain.* [10]*Then you are to celebrate the Festival of Weeks before the LORD your God with the voluntary offering that you will bring, in proportion to how he has blessed you*. NET

The people were to bring an offering of an amount that was in proportion to the size of the harvest that God had blessed them with. Today believers likewise offer a portion of what they have earned from their work.

. . . In fact, all we have to give God has been given to us by him and ultimately belongs to him

1Chr 29:14, 16 [DAVID, TO GOD:] But *who am I and who are my people, that we should be in a position to contribute this much? Indeed, everything comes from you, and we have simply given back to you what is yours. ...* [16]*O LORD our God, all this wealth, which we have collected to build a temple for you to honor your holy name, comes from you; it all belongs to you.* NET

Offerings express thanksgiving to God for his deliverance

Ps 56:12–13 [DAVID:] O God, I have taken vows before you; therefore *I will offer thanksgiving sacrifices to you.* [13]*For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living!* ISV

Offerings support the service of God

Ex 35:29 *The Israelites brought a freewill offering to the LORD, every man and woman whose heart was willing to bring materials for all the work that the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.* NET

Offerings are often to help the needy – bringing thanks and praise to God

2Cor 9:12–13 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] *What you are doing is much more than a service that supplies God's people with what they need. It is something that will make many others thank God.* [13]*The way in which you have proved yourselves by this service will bring honor and praise to God.* You believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by sharing generously with God's people and with everyone else. CEV

The Corinthians' "service" was giving towards the needs of the poor believers in Jerusalem, as referred

to in the latter part of v. 13. Such giving is effectively making offerings to God.

By giving to God, we ourselves will be blessed

Luke 6:38 *Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive.* NET

Phil 4:18–19 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS:] For I have received everything, and I have plenty. I have all I need because I received from Epaphroditus *what you sent – a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God.* [19]*And my God will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* NET

Note: God has given us the ultimate gift – Jesus Christ himself

John 3:16 For this is the way God loved the world: *He gave his one and only Son,* so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. NET

2Cor 9:14–15 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] And in their prayers on your behalf they long for you because of *the extraordinary grace God has shown to you.* [15]*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!* NET

Verse 14 speaks of the Corinthians' generosity as being a manifestation of God's extraordinary grace. By its insertion immediately following this, v. 15 suggests that God's "indescribable gift" of his Son is a reason and motivating factor for Christians to give to God, in accordance with and in appreciation of his incredible gift to them.

b) What to Give to God

Give the "firstfruits" to God

2Chr 31:5 As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel *gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field.* ESV

The OT speaks of giving to God the first portion of what we produce, often referred to as the "firstfruits". Today many believers emulate this by giving to God a portion of their wage on first receiving it. This acknowledges God's provision and goodness in a way that honors him (cf. Prov 3:9) – putting him first, rather than simply offering him the leftovers that we can spare. Note also that offering the firstfruits to God was a statement, made in faith, that the rest of the harvest would take place – a principle also applicable today.

Give the best to God . . .

Ex 23:19a [A DIRECTIVE TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the Holy Tent of the LORD your God.* NCV™

. . . Do not give what is inferior to God

Lev 22:20–21 [DIRECTIVES TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you.* [21]*And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it.* ESV

Give all that you can

2Cor 8:2–3a [PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES:] They have been tested by great troubles, and *they are very poor. But they gave much because of their great joy.* [3]*I can tell you that they gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford.* NCV™

Mark 12:41–44 Then he [Jesus] sat down opposite the offering box, and watched the crowd putting coins into it. Many rich people were throwing in large amounts. [42]And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, worth less than a penny. [43]He called his disciples and said to them, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the offering box than all the others. [44]For they all gave out of their wealth. But *she, out of her poverty, put in what she had to live on, everything she had.*" NET

It would appear that Jesus is speaking of the widow's action as being exemplary.

The practice of giving an amount in proportion to one's income – such as a tenth

1Cor 16:2 [Paul, to believers:] Every Sunday each of you must *put aside some money, in proportion to what you have earned*, and save it up, so that there will be no need to collect money when I come. GNT

Deut 14:22 [A directive to the Israelites:] *Set aside a tithe—a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.* GNT

Offer spiritual sacrifices to God

1Pet 2:5a [Peter, to believers:] You also are like living stones, so let yourselves be used to build a spiritual temple—to be holy priests who *offer spiritual sacrifices to God*. NCV™

Heb 13:15 Through him then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. NET

c) How to Give to God

Give in a way that is acceptable to God

Lev 19:5 [A directive to the Israelites:] *When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the Lord, offer it in such a way that will be accepted.* NCV™

Give willingly

2Cor 9:7 [Paul, to believers:] *Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.* NET

Give joyfully

1Chr 29:17b [David, to God:] In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, *offering freely and joyously to you.* ESV

Note that the first part of the verse speaks of making offerings with sincerity and honest intent.

Give generously

2Cor 9:5–6 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] Therefore I thought it necessary to urge these brothers to go to you in advance and to arrange ahead of time *the generous contribution* you had promised, so this may be ready as *a generous gift and not as something you feel forced to do*. [6]My point is this: *The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.* NET

Note that in v. 5 Paul is speaking of a gift towards the support of needy believers.

Give regularly . . .

1Cor 16:2 [Paul, to believers:] *On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income* and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come. NET

This verse is quite probably speaking of money being brought to Christian gatherings held on the first day of every week.

. . . and give on special occasions

Num 29:39 [A directive to the Israelites:] *"'At your festivals you should bring these to the Lord: your burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and fellowship offerings. These are in addition to other promised offerings and special gifts you want to give to the Lord.'"* NCV™

1Ki 8:63 *Solomon offered as peace offerings to the Lord 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep. Then the king and all the Israelites dedicated the Lord's temple.* NET

Note: The practice of making of vows to God, which have to be kept

Deut 23:21–23 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *When you make a vow to the Lord your God, don't delay paying it, because the Lord your God will certainly demand payment from you, and then you will be guilty of sin.* [22]But if you refrain from making a vow, then you won't be guilty. [23]*Be sure you do whatever you promise, because you have given your word voluntarily to the Lord your God.* ISV

Vows are voluntary promises made to God, usually as an act of worship, expressing devotion or thanksgiving. Regarding thanksgiving, vows may be made either in response to something one has

received or as a promise to God if he would grant a request. A vow usually involves offering something to God, but can instead involve doing something or abstaining from something. The practice is not compulsory and is rarely mentioned in the NT.

d) Righteousness and Making Offerings

We must live righteously to acceptably worship God . . .

Amos 5:7, 21, 23–24 [God:] *You, Israel, turn justice into poison and throw righteousness on the ground. ...* [21]*I hate your festivals; I despise them. I'm not pleased with your religious assemblies. ...* [23]*Spare me the sound of your songs. I won't listen to the music of your harps.* [24]*But let justice flow like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* GW

Mal 3:3–4 He [the Messiah] will sit refining and purifying silver, purifying the children of Levi, refining them like gold and silver. *Then they'll bring an offering in righteousness to the Lord.* [4]*Then the offering to the Lord by Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable* as it was in the past, even as in former years. ISV

. . . Our offerings are not acceptable to God if our lives do not please him

Jer 6:19b–20 [God, speaking of his unfaithful people:] For *they have paid no attention to what I have said, and they have rejected my law.* [20]*I take no delight when they offer up to me frankincense that comes from Sheba or sweet-smelling cane imported from a faraway land. I cannot accept the burnt offerings they bring me. I get no pleasure from the sacrifices they offer to me.* NET

Moreover, God desires righteousness more than offerings and sacrifices

Mark 12:33 And *to love him* [God] *with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.* NET

1Sam 15:22 But Samuel answered [King Saul], *"What pleases the Lord more: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience to his voice? It is better to obey than to sacrifice. It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of sheep.* NCV™

We should in fact offer ourselves to God, in service to him

Rom 12:1 [Paul:] So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: *offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.* GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 28

Serving God

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I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights

All of God's people are necessarily his servants – and so need to be prepared to serve him. This requires devotion to God and to his work.

As well as instructing us to serve God, the Bible provides plenty of encouragement to persevere in doing so. The Bible also gives insights into being guided by God, something which is very much applicable to serving God as well as to other areas of our lives.

a) Be Prepared to Serve God

We are called to serve God and Jesus Christ

1Pet 2:16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. *Live as servants of God*. NCV™

Rom 12:11 Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, *serve the Lord*. NET

Be willing to do God's work

1Pet 5:2 [PETER, TO CHURCH LEADERS:] Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you, *exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly* under God's direction, *not for shameful profit but eagerly*. NET

Be prepared and ready to do God's work

1Pet 1:13a So *prepare your minds for service* and have self-control. NCV™

Jer 1:17a [GOD:] But you, Jeremiah, *get yourself ready!* Go and tell these people everything I instruct you to say. NET

Live a godly life in readiness for doing God's work

Titus 1:7–8 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF CHURCH LEADERS:] For *the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God's work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain.* [8]*Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self–controlled*. NET

Consecrate yourself to serve God . . .

Ex 28:41 [GOD, TO MOSES:] And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and *consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests*. ESV

In the OT the act of consecration involved rituals signifying that the person involved was setting themselves apart from all that was not holy in order to be holy or sacred, so as to be fit and ready to serve God. As God himself is holy, it is essential that those who serve him are likewise holy. Although the rituals involved in the OT practice of consecration are not pertinent to Christians, the concept of setting oneself apart from all that is not holy in order to serve God is very much applicable.

. . . Be set apart as holy

2Tim 2:21 *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.* ESV

One must cleanse oneself from corruptive influences in order to be holy, useful to God, ready to do his work.

b) Be Devoted to God's Work

Devote yourself to God's work

Ezra 7:10 Now *Ezra had dedicated himself to the study of the law of the LORD, to its observance, and to teaching its statutes and judgments in Israel.* NET

Titus 3:8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may *be careful to devote themselves to good works*. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ESV

Serve God only – do not serve anything or anyone else . . .

1Sam 7:3–4 Samuel said to all the people of Israel, "If you are really turning to the LORD with

all your hearts, remove from among you the foreign gods and the images of Ashtoreth. *Give your hearts to the LORD and serve only him.* Then he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines." [4]So the Israelites removed the Baals and images of Ashtoreth. *They served only the LORD.* NET

Dan 3:17–18, 28 [SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO, TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR:] Your majesty, if it be his will, *our God whom we serve* can deliver us from the blazing fire furnace, and he will deliver us from you. [18]But if not, rest assured, your majesty, that *we won't serve your gods*, and we won't worship the golden statue that you have set up." ... [28]Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said: 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! He sent his angel to deliver his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and *were willing to risk their lives in order not to serve or worship any god except their own God*. ISV

. . . Seek to please God rather than people

Gal 1:10 [PAUL:] *I am not trying to please people. I want to please God. Do you think I am trying to please people? If I were doing that, I would not be a servant of Christ.* CEV

Put Jesus Christ before everyone else

Matt 10:37 [JESUS:] *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* NET

Put God and his work before your own interests

Ps 132:3–5 [DAVID:] *"I will not enter my house or get into my bed, [4]I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, [5]until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."* ESV

> These verses probably are speaking of David's intent to build a temple for God.

Give up your life to live for God and Jesus Christ . . .

Rom 12:1 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: *offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.* GNT

Luke 9:23 Then he [Jesus] said to them all, "If anyone wants to become my follower, *he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.* NET

> We must deny ourselves – give up living for ourselves and what we want – and live for Christ instead, daily shouldering the accompanying difficulties.

. . . Be willing even to endanger your life

Acts 20:22–24 [PAUL:] And *now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem without knowing what will happen to me there, [23]except that the Holy Spirit warns me in town after town that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. [24]But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.* NET

Be willing to give up everything for God and Jesus Christ

Luke 14:33 In the same way," concluded Jesus, "*none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.* GNT

Matt 13:44–46 *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field. [45]"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. [46]When he found a pearl of great value, he went out and sold everything he had and bought it.* NET

> Although some commentators have a somewhat different understanding, both these parables seem to be essentially illustrating the absolute cost of the kingdom of God; one must be prepared to forgo everything for it. Note the joy in doing so that is apparent in v. 44.

c) Reasons to Serve God

He is our God, who has done great things for us

Deut 10:20–21 [Moses, to the Israelites:] Revere *the Lord your God, serve him*, be loyal to him and take oaths only in his name. [21]He is the one you should praise; *he is your God, the one who has done these great and awesome things for you that you have seen*. NET

We are God's servants

James 1:1a From *James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ.* CEV

Lev 25:55 [God:] This is because *the people of Israel are servants to me. They are my servants*, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. NCV™

God cares for his servants

Isa 41:9b–10 [God, to Israel:] I told you, *"You are my servant."* I have chosen you and not rejected you. [10]*Don't be afraid, for I am with you! Don't be frightened, for I am your God! I strengthen you – yes, I help you – yes, I uphold you with my saving right hand!* NET

> God's care of his servants gives good reason to serve God.

Your work for God will be productive

Luke 8:15 [Jesus, explaining a parable:] But the ones on the good soil are the people who hear the word but also hold on to it with good and honest hearts, *producing a crop through endurance*. ISV

> The "crop" produced may well be referring to – or at least may be applied to – the productivity of one's work for the kingdom (as per the theme of this subsection). Alternatively the spiritual growth of the individual believer may be in view.

You will be rewarded for your work

2Chr 15:7 But as for you, be strong and don't get discouraged, for *your work will be rewarded*. NET

Mark 10:29–30 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, *there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel* [30]*who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields,* all with persecutions – *and in the age to come, eternal life*. NET

> In v. 29 Jesus mentions some things that his followers may be required to forego in following and serving him. In v. 30 Jesus speaks of corresponding blessings of this present "age". These blessings are primarily fulfilled through the new relationships in the family of God's people, to which Jesus' followers belong.

Whoever does not produce good "fruit" will be cut off from God and Jesus Christ

Matt 3:10 *Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.* NET

John 15:2a [Jesus, speaking of God:] *He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit.* NCV™

> Note that when used metaphorically in the NT, "fruit" can refer to spiritual characteristics (cf. Gal 5:22–23) or spiritual outcomes of quality work for the kingdom. In verses in this chapter, "fruit" has been interpreted to be referring to the latter, or at least to be inclusive of it.

Further warnings and consequences regarding not doing God's work

Luke 12:47 *That servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or do what his master asked will receive a severe beating.* NET

Hag 1:9 [God, to the people of Judah:] *You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.* ESV

> In working on their own interests rather than doing God's work, rebuilding his temple, the results of the people's efforts were very disappointing.

Note: Do not work for things that do not satisfy or do not last

Isa 55:2a [God:] *Why pay money for something that will not nourish you? Why spend your hard-earned money on something that will not satisfy?* NET

John 6:27a *Do not work for food that goes bad; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life.* GNT

Rather than working simply for what spoils or does not last, work for that which leads to eternal life.

d) Being Guided by God

See also:

- *d) God Guides His People*, p. 213

The topic of being guided by God is very pertinent to serving God – such as in ascertaining his will in regard to how we should serve him. It is also of course important in other aspects of our lives. For it is vital in living righteously generally and in navigating through troubled times, as reflected in some of the following verses. God's guidance also becomes an issue when we need to make a significant choice or decision.

God's guidance may come through such sources as: the Holy Spirit's promptings; inner conviction or assurance (itself largely of the Holy Spirit); Scripture; circumstances; or advice from others. But God does not always guide his people by making them aware of his will. They may not even be aware of being guided by God, only recognizing his guidance in retrospect. The Bible actually says little about how one should find out God's guidance (apart from his directions evident in his laws). But the Bible does speak of how living a godly life and prayer are critical for being open to it – as is indicated in the following subsections.

To be guided by God, live a godly life

Isa 58:9b–11a [DIRECTIVES TO ISRAEL:] *You must remove the burdensome yoke from among you and stop pointing fingers and speaking sinfully.* [10]*You must actively help the hungry and feed the oppressed. Then* your light will dispel the darkness, and your darkness will be transformed into noonday. [11]*The LORD will continually lead you;* he will feed you even in parched regions. NET

Prov 3:5–6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. [6]*Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight.* NET

A straight path (v. 6) suggests a way that is righteous and/or secure. The expression "make your paths straight" seems to be speaking either of: directing our ways so that we will take a straight path (cf. GNT, NLT, NKJV); or straightening the path before us (cf. CEV). Possibly aspects of both interpretations are involved.

Ask God to guide you (as in troubled times)

Ps 31:3 [DAVID, TO GOD:] For you are my rock and my fortress; *for the sake of your name guide me and lead me.* ISV

God's will is understood through godliness and prayer

Rom 12:2 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Do not be conformed to this world, but continually be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may be able to determine what God's will is—what is proper, pleasing, and perfect.* ISV

Col 1:9–10 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] For this reason, since the day we heard about this, *we have not stopped praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the full knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,* [10]so that you might live in a manner worthy of the Lord and be fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the full knowledge of God. ISV

This is of course a prayer that God's will for others be revealed to them, but it is still indicative of the need to pray ourselves in understanding God's will in our own lives. Note that v. 10 indicates that in asking God to enable the Colossians to know his will (v. 9), Paul had their service to God in view (the subject of this chapter) along with related aspects of the Christian life.

Other sources of godly and wise guidance

Prov 1:1–5 *The Proverbs of Solomon* son of David, king of Israel: [2]*To learn wisdom and moral instruction, and to discern wise counsel.* [3]*To receive moral instruction in skillful living, in righteousness, justice, and equity.* [4]*To impart shrewdness to the morally naive, and a discerning plan to the young person.* [5]*(Let the wise also hear and gain instruction, and let the discerning acquire guidance!)* NET

This shows that God's word – here Proverbs in particular – provides guidance, as v. 5 explicitly indicates.

Prov 11:14 *When there is no guidance a nation falls, but there is success in the abundance of counselors.* NET

This illustrates the importance of advice from others in obtaining guidance, with wise advisors presumably being in view.

Col 3:15 [Paul, to the Colossian believers:] And *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,* to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ESV

In its context the reference is to relationships with other believers, in which Christ's "peace" in the church body – and so also in the "hearts" of its members – should be sought and maintained amidst working through differences. The first part of the verse is often applied to obtaining personal guidance, being used to point to the principle of being at peace with a particular choice.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Doing God's Work

In instructing us in how to do God's work, serving him, the Bible urges us to do our best but emphasizes God's role and the need to rely on him. The Bible also teaches us about: the manner in which we should serve God; serving God in a church context; and God's extraordinary spiritual gifts to his people for serving him.

a) Do God's Work – the Best You Can

Do the work assigned to you . . .

Eph 2:10 [Paul, to believers:] God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus *he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do*. GNT

It would appear that Paul is speaking of God preparing in advance particular work for each believer to do (cf. AMP). As such, believers need to look to God to guide them and enable them to do the work – and willingly do it.

. . . Carry out God's will

Eph 6:6 [Paul, to Christian slaves:] Do not do this only while being watched in order to please them, but *be like slaves of the Messiah who do God's will from the heart*. ISV

Work hard at God's work . . .

Rom 16:12 [Paul, to the Roman believers:] Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have *worked hard for the Lord*. Greet dear Persis, who has *worked very hard for the Lord*. GW

. . . Endure associated persecution and hardships

2Cor 6:4–5 [Paul:] But *as God's servants, we have commended ourselves in every way, with great endurance, in persecutions, in difficulties, in distresses, [5]in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in troubles, in sleepless nights, in hunger, …* NET

Do quality work which bears "fruit" – "fruit" that will last

John 15:16 [Jesus, to his disciples:] You did not choose me. *I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last.* Then my Father will give you whatever you ask for in my name. CEV

1Cor 3:10–15 [Paul:] According to the grace of God given to me, *like a skilled master-builder I laid a foundation*, but someone else builds on it. And *each one must be careful how he builds*. [11]For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12]*If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, [13]each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done. [14]If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward. [15]If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.* NET

Here Paul speaks of the work of building the church, and is probably primarily addressing church teachers. Builders need to be careful to build with quality materials – symbolized by the gold, silver and precious stones (v. 12). Such "materials" would include correct doctrine, complemented by a godly lifestyle. Quality work – as with poor work – will be shown for what it is by testing on "the Day" of judgment (vv. 13–14).

Persist at serving God

Dan 6:20 As he [King Darius] approached the den, he called out to Daniel in a worried voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, was *your God whom you continually serve* able to rescue you from the lions?" NET

Complete the work you have been given

Col 4:17b *"See to it that you complete the ministry you received in the Lord."* NET

Acts 20:24 [Paul:] But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so *that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus*, to testify to the good news of God's grace. NET

b) Do the Work through God

See also:

- *c) God Works through His People (II): Empowerment*, p. 212
- *T*, p. 386

Apart from God and Jesus Christ we can accomplish nothing

John 15:4–5 [Jesus, to his disciples:] Remain in me, and I will remain in you. *Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.* [5]*"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me – and I in him – bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing.* NET

1Cor 3:6–7 [Paul:] I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, *but God made them sprout and grow.* [7]*What matters isn't those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow.* CEV

> God's servants cannot themselves produce any true and lasting spiritual results or growth from the work that they do – only God can.

Pray to God for help in the work – and ask others to pray

Acts 4:29–31 [The early believers, praying:] And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and *grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,* [30]*while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* [31]*When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.* NET

Eph 6:19–20 [Paul, to the Ephesian believers:] *Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak – that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel,* [20]for which I am an ambassador in chains. *Pray that I may be able to speak boldly as I ought to speak.* NET

Do God's work through God and his power

John 3:21 But those who follow the true way come to the light, and it shows that *the things they do were done through God.* NCV™

2Cor 6:7 *We have spoken the truth, and God's power has worked in us.* In all our struggles we have said and done only what is right. CEV

Do the work by faith

Heb 11:32–34 And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. [33]*Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice,* received promises, shut the mouths of lions, [34]put out raging fires, escaped death by the sword, found strength in weakness, *became powerful in battle, and routed foreign armies.* ISV

> In fighting their enemies (vv. 33a, 34b; 2Chr 14:11b ⇩) – along with administering justice (v. 33a) – these men of God were in a real sense doing God's work, doing so by faith. As such passages like this are very much applicable to believers in doing their work for God.

Do the work in God's "name" . . .

2Chr 14:11b [Asa, King of Judah:] Help us now, O Lord our God, because *we are relying on you, and in your name we have come out to fight against this huge army.* Lord, you are our God; no one can hope to defeat you. GNT

> To the ancient Hebrews and Jews, a person's name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and aims or cause. As such, doing something in God's name would appear to involve acting: as his representative; by his authority; and in accordance with his will. Doing so is allied with acting in reliance on his power, by faith in him. (The same applies to acting in Jesus Christ's name, as per the following subsection.)

. . . Do the work in the "name" of Jesus Christ

Col 3:17 And *whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,* giving thanks to God the Father through him. NET

> The exhortation in this verse was not made specifically in reference to doing God's work, but obviously is applicable to it.

Serve God through the Holy Spirit

Rom 7:6 [Paul, to believers:] But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that *we serve in the new way of the Spirit* and not in the old way of the written code. ESV

2Tim 1:14 [Paul, to Timothy:] *Protect that good thing* [the gospel message] *entrusted to you, through the Holy Spirit who lives within us.* NET

> God's people serve and obey him now by following the directing of the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit's empowerment, rather than by focusing on "obeying the letter of the law" (NLT).

Note: Commit to God whatever you do

Prov 16:3 *Commit your works to the Lord*, and your plans will be established. NET

c) The Manner in Which to Serve God

Serve God in holiness and righteousness

Luke 1:73b–75 [Zechariah, the priest:] This oath [of God] grants [74]that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, may *serve him without fear,* [75]*in holiness and righteousness* before him for as long as we live. NET

Serve God with humility

Acts 20:19 [Paul:] *I served the Lord with all humility,* with tears, and with trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. ISV

Luke 17:10 [Jesus, to his disciples:] So you also, *when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'* ESV

Serve God with all your heart

Deut 10:12 [Moses:] And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to *serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, …* ESV

Be strong and courageous, as God is with those doing his work

1Chr 28:10 [David, to Solomon:] Realize now that the Lord has chosen you to build a temple as his sanctuary. *Be strong and do it!* NET

Deut 31:23 The Lord gave this command to Joshua, son of Nun: *"Be strong and courageous, because you will bring the Israelites into the land that I swore to give them, and I will be with you."* GW

Do not be afraid as you do God's work . . .

Ezek 2:6–7 [God, to Ezekiel:] But you, son of man, *do not fear them, and do not fear their words – even though briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions – do not fear their words and do not be terrified of the looks they give you,* for they are a rebellious house! [7]*You must speak my words to them whether they listen or not,* for they are rebellious. NET

. . . Instead, fear God and serve him faithfully

1Sam 12:24 However, *fear the Lord and serve him faithfully* with all your heart. Just look at the great things he has done for you! NET

d) Working with Other Believers

See also:

- *d) Help Each Other*, p. 291

> This section speaks of working with other believers both in: working among them, ministering to them; and working alongside them, ministering to others (such as in outreach). Note that most of the other teachings in this chapter are also very relevant to this topic.

Serve each other

Gal 5:13 [Paul, to believers:] For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but *through love serve one another.* NET

Mark 9:35 After he [Jesus] sat down, he called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must *be last of all and servant of all*." NET

Do God's work together

Phil 4:3 [PAUL:] Yes, I say also to you, true companion, help them [Euodia and Syntyche]. *They have struggled together in the gospel ministry along with me and Clement and my other coworkers*, whose names are in the book of life. NET

3Jn 1:7–8 [JOHN, SPEAKING OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS:] After all, they went on their trip to serve the one named Christ, and they didn't accept any help from the people to whom they went. [8]*We must support believers who go on trips like this so that we can work together with them in spreading the truth.* GW

Encourage each other in doing God's work

Heb 10:24 *We must also consider how to encourage each other to show love and to do good things.* GW

2Chr 35:2 He [King Josiah] appointed the priests to fulfill their duties and *encouraged them to carry out their service in the LORD's temple*. NET

Keep each other informed about the work and associated challenges

Acts 14:27 *When they* [Paul and Barnabas] *arrived and gathered the church together, they reported all the things God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles.* NET

Acts 4:23 *When they were released, Peter and John went to their fellow believers and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said to them.* NET

Note: Churches send out workers, to aid the spread of the gospel

Acts 13:1–3 Now there were these prophets and teachers *in the church at Antioch*: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch from childhood) and Saul. [2]While they were serving the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* [3]*Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off.* NET

Acts 8:14 Now *when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them*. NET

e) Spiritual Gifts

God equips his people to serve him, notably by giving them spiritual gifts.

God gives each of his people a spiritual gift, through the Holy Spirit

1Cor 7:7 [PAUL:] I wish that everyone were like me, but *each person has his own gift from God*. One has one gift, another has another gift. NCV™

1Cor 12:8 *The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom, and the same Spirit gives another the ability to speak with knowledge.* NCV™

God's people are given different spiritual gifts

Rom 12:6 And *we have different gifts according to the grace given to us.* NET

The various spiritual gifts

1Cor 12:8–10 For *one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit,* [9]*to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,* [10]*to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues*. NET

Broadly speaking, "the message of wisdom" and "the message of knowledge" (v. 8) quite possibly are respectively "the ability to give wise advice" (NLT) or insight and "the gift of special knowledge" (NLT) – with probably the application and conveying of spiritual truths being particularly in view.

The term "faith" (v. 9) does not refer to saving faith, but to exceptional faith or trust in God. The gift of "prophecy" (v. 10) is the communication of a revelation from God, such as a foretelling of a future

event or a revelation of God's will regarding a certain matter.

The gift of "discernment of spirits" (v. 10) appears to be the ability to distinguish whether something, such as a prophecy or teaching, is prompted by the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit. The gift of "tongues" (v. 10) is the ability to speak in an unlearned language. (Note that further spiritual gifts are mentioned in the following subsection.)

Make good use of spiritual gifts, using them appropriately

1Tim 4:14 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Do not neglect the spiritual gift you have*, given to you and confirmed by prophetic words when the elders laid hands on you. NET

Rom 12:6b–8 [PAUL:] So *if your gift is prophecy, use your gift in proportion to your faith.* [7]*If your gift is serving, devote yourself to serving others. If it is teaching, devote yourself to teaching others.* [8]*If it is encouraging, devote yourself to encouraging others. If it is sharing, share generously. If it is leading, lead enthusiastically. If it is helping, help cheerfully.* ISV

The phrase "in proportion to your faith" (v. 6) most likely refers to the extent of one's faith in God – "according to the amount of faith we have" (CEV).

Use your spiritual gift to build up the church

Eph 4:11–13 It was he [Christ] who *gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* [12]*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ,* [13]*until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature*. NET

As parts of the body of Christ, believers are to use the gifts they have been given (v. 11) in ministry (v. 12a) so that Christ's body may be built up and become mature (vv. 12b–13).

Further instructions about spiritual gifts

1Cor 14:1, 39 Pursue love and *be eager for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.* … [39]*So then, brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid anyone from speaking in tongues.* NET

1Thes 5:19–20 *Do not put out the Spirit's fire.* [20]*Do not despise prophecies.* ISV

The use of spiritual gifts in corporate worship and meetings is most likely in view here. The Thessalonians were not to stifle the Holy Spirit's work by restricting the expression of spiritual gifts.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 29

Significant Practices

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I. Symbolic Rites

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are considered by many churches to be the Christian rites or sacraments. "Sacrament" comes from a Latin term meaning "military oath". The sacraments are often spoken of as being an outward sign with an inner significance. They are practiced by churches in worship ceremonies. Circumcision was also a rite practiced by God's people, under the first covenant, but has no such relevance under the second covenant.

a) Baptism

The Greek translated as "baptism" denotes washing in water. Opinions differ as to whether baptism need necessarily involve full immersion in water, as opposed to simply pouring or sprinkling water on the person being baptized.

God's people are baptized in (or into) the "name" of Jesus Christ

Acts 19:5 On hearing this, *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*. ESV

Being baptized in or into the "name" of Jesus Christ, is in part a declaration of our identification and relationship with Jesus Christ, and our commitment or allegiance to him. This explanation reflects both the meaning of the Latin from which "sacrament" comes – military oath (as commented above) – and the concept of being united with him (discussed in the following subsection).

Baptism into Jesus Christ signifies being united with him – with the corresponding implications

Rom 6:2b–5 How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it? [3]Or don't you know that *all of us who were baptized into union with the Messiah Jesus were baptized into his death?* [4]*Therefore, through baptism we were buried with him into his death so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too may live an entirely new life.* [5]*For if we have become united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.* ISV

After indicating that baptism signifies the spiritual union of the believer with Christ (v. 3), Paul draws parallels between baptism and other aspects of this spiritual union. Paul appears to parallel one's immersion in water at baptism, with being immersed in death with Christ in his death (vv. 3–4a, 5a). As such, baptism portrays the death of our old self which was enslaved to sin (cf. vv. 6–7), and so a death to sin (v. 2b). Subsequently baptism symbolizes one being raised up in union with Christ to live a new spiritual life (vv. 4b, 5b).

Baptism signifies belief

Acts 8:12 But *when they believed Philip as he was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized*, both men and women. NET

Baptism is a declaration and confirmation of belief.

Baptism signifies the washing away of sins

Acts 22:16 [Ananias, to Saul:] And now what are you waiting for? Get up, *be baptized, and have your sins washed away*, calling on his name. NET

This should not be interpreted to mean that baptism in itself brings the forgiveness of sin. Rather, the external washing in water is symbolic of one's spiritual cleansing.

Baptism signifies or is linked with receiving the Holy Spirit

Acts 10:47 [Peter:] *"No one can refuse to baptize these people with water. They have received the Holy Spirit in the same way that we did."* GW

Here Peter is referring to Gentiles who had come to faith.

b) The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is regularly practiced in churches. It primarily symbolizes and commemorates Jesus Christ's death for us. The breaking of the bread symbolizes the breaking of his body, and the pouring out of the wine symbolizes the pouring out of his blood. Eating of the bread and drinking of the wine is in part a declaration of our own belief in Christ's death and its implications – and correspondingly signifies our participation in the forgiveness and other outcomes that it made possible.

Observe the Lord's Supper – in remembrance of Jesus Christ and his death

1Cor 11:23–25 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that *the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread,* [24]*and after he had given thanks he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* [25]*In the same way, he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, every time you drink it, in remembrance of me."* NET

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (v. 25) speaks of Jesus Christ's blood, shed in his death, introducing the new relationship – or covenant – between God and his people. In part at least this was achieved by his death bringing forgiveness for the sins of God's people. The shedding of his blood inaugurated the new covenant and ratified or sealed it (cf. AMP, GNT, NCV, NLT) – just as the sprinkling of "the blood of the covenant" by Moses ceremonially confirmed the old covenant (cf. Ex 24:5–8).

Sharing in the Lord's Supper also symbolizes sharing in the blood and body of Jesus Christ

1Cor 10:16–17 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] *The cup of blessing that we bless is a sign of our sharing in the blood of the Messiah, isn't it? The bread that we break is a sign of our sharing in the body of the Messiah, isn't it?* [17]*Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, because all of us partake of the one loaf.* ISV

The two rhetorical questions in v. 16 appear to imply that drinking from the cup and eating of the bread – in addition to remembering Jesus Christ and his death – symbolize one's participation in what Christ's death accomplished, i.e. forgiveness and thus salvation. However, in view of v. 17, the second rhetorical question may well additionally or alternatively mean that eating from the one loaf of bread symbolizes one being part of and participating in Christ's body, the church.

Further insights on the Lord's Supper

Acts 2:42 *They* [the believers] *were devoting themselves* to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, *to the breaking of bread* and to prayer. NET

This suggests that the Lord's Supper – "the breaking of bread" – should be practiced regularly.

1Cor 5:7b [Paul, to believers:] For *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.* NET

Paul is drawing a parallel here between the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (with the resultant salvation) and the sacrificial lamb of the Passover meal (which signified the deliverance/salvation from Egypt). Particularly in light of this parallel, by instituting the observance of "the Lord's Supper" at a Passover meal (cf. Matt 26:17–19, 26–28) Jesus himself may have been intimating a parallel between it and the Jewish Passover meal. As such, observing the Lord's Supper similarly celebrates and signifies God's salvation – but a greater, ultimate salvation.

Do not participate in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner

1Cor 11:27–29 [Paul, to believers:] It follows that *if anyone eats the Lord's bread or drinks from his cup in a way that dishonors him, he or she is guilty of sin against the Lord's body and blood.* [28]*So then, you should all examine yourselves first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup.* [29]*For if people do not recognize the meaning of the Lord's body when they eat the bread and drink from the cup, they bring judgment on themselves as they eat and drink.* GNT

The instruction to "examine" oneself before participating in the Lord's Supper (v. 28) refers primarily to examining the manner in which one is approaching the Lord's Supper, so as to not do so in a flippant, unworthy manner (v. 27), not bearing in mind its significance (v. 29). Paul may also have in view the need – in preparing to participate – to examine the right state of ourselves before God, examining our hearts for unconfessed sin.

c) Circumcision: Its Needlessness

Circumcision of males is the cutting off of the foreskin. Jewish males undergo circumcision in keeping with both God's covenant with Abraham (their ancestor), and God's covenant and law for Israel, i.e. the Mosaic Law.

In regard to God's covenant and law for Israel, being circumcised signifies one's adherence to the law – on which the covenant was based – as the way to righteousness. This is in contrast to and at odds with the way of faith in Jesus Christ, which God introduced in conjunction with the new covenant.

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham – and included in the Mosaic Law

Gen 17:9–11 And *God said to Abraham*, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. [10]*This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.* [11]*You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.* ESV

John 7:22–23 [JESUS, TO THE JEWS:] *Moses ordered you to circumcise your sons (although it was not Moses but your ancestors who started it), and so you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath.* [23]If *a boy is circumcised on the Sabbath so that Moses' Law is not broken*, why are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? GNT

Circumcision does not bring salvation

Acts 15:1–2, 11 Now some men came down from Judea [to the church at Antioch] and *began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* [2]*When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them*, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement. ...[PETER:] [11]*On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus*, in the same way as they are." NET

In v. 11 the apostle Peter sides emphatically with Paul and Barnabas, indicating that circumcision and adherence to the OT law (which circumcision symbolizes) do not bring salvation.

For believers, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any consequence

Gal 5:6 For *in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight* – the only thing that matters is faith working through love. NET

It is our hearts that must be circumcised – as is ultimately accomplished by God

Deut 10:16 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Therefore, *circumcise your heart and stop being stubborn*. ISV

Deut 30:6 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Then *the LORD your God will circumcise both your hearts and those of your descendants* so that you can love him with your heart and with your soul and therefore live. ISV

Circumcision of the heart involves changing to become responsive to God. It involves "cutting off" the rigidity of sin from a person's heart.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Other Significant Practices

It is important for each Christian to understand all significant church practices. The practice of confessing Jesus Christ is one such practice that we need to understand – and be prepared to do. The weekly Sabbath is to some extent ignored by a lot of Christians, many seeing it as not relevant in the new covenant – but many evangelical theologians would "beg to differ". Reasons both for and against observing it are included in this section. Fasting, when undertaken with a godly focus, is a significant practice that is a very valuable supplement to such things as prayer and worship. The laying on of hands is a further common practice, and so we should also be familiar with its significance and use in the Bible.

a) Confession of Jesus Christ

The NT speaks of confessing or acknowledging Jesus Christ. Usually it is implicit or suggested – as the word "confess" implies – that this is done in the presence of others. Confessing Jesus Christ is an expression of allegiance to him, as Lord, and involves stating what one believes about him. It is often done formally at one's baptism and corporately in church with the recital of creeds or "confessions". In addition, many Christians will experience times in which they should acknowledge Jesus Christ and their faith in him before unbelievers – often at the cost or risk of being persecuted.

Confess (or acknowledge) Jesus Christ, before others

Heb 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, take note of *Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess*, … NET

Luke 12:8 [Jesus:] I tell you, whoever *acknowledges me before men*, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before God's angels. NET

Note that the Greek translated here as "acknowledge" or "acknowledges" is at times translated as "confess" or "confesses" in other Bible translations – as is the case with this verse (cf. AMP, NASB, NKJV).

Things to confess about Jesus Christ

John 9:22b For the Jewish leaders had already agreed that anyone who *confessed Jesus to be the Christ* would be put out of the synagogue. NET

Phil 2:11 And everyone will *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* and bring glory to God the Father. NCV™

1Jn 4:15 If anyone *confesses that Jesus is the Son of God*, God resides in him and he in God. NET

Outcomes of confessing Jesus Christ

Matt 10:32 [Jesus:] *Whoever, then, acknowledges me before people, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.* NET

Rom 10:9–10 [Paul:] … because, *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*. [10]For with the heart one believes and is justified, and *with the mouth one confesses and is saved*. ESV

One will be saved if one confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord and believes that God raised him to life (v. 9). Presumably the latter has in view also believing the implications of Jesus Christ's resurrection for our salvation. Note that a literal interpretation of these verses, which a number of commentators do take, would mean that one has to make such a verbal confession to be saved. Another view is that Paul is drawing on the "mouth"/"heart" terminology in the quotation from Deuteronomy 30:14 (v. 8b) to emphasize the need for genuine belief in Christ.

Note: If we deny Jesus Christ, he will deny us

Matt 10:33 [Jesus:] But *whoever denies me before people, I will deny him also before my Father in heaven*. NET

Mark 8:38 [Jesus:] *For if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* NET

Although the gravity of the above warnings should not be diluted, the verses should not be interpreted to mean that a single act of denial will necessarily result in Jesus Christ disowning that person. This is illustrated in Peter's experience (cf. Matt 26:33–35, 69–75; John 21:15–17).

b) Keeping the Sabbath Holy

God made the seventh day of the week holy by setting it apart as a day of rest. It is called the "Sabbath", which means "to cease". Thus to observe or keep the Sabbath we cease from work and rest. In conjunction with this, rather than engaging in our usual activities we dedicate the day to God. As such we keep the Sabbath day holy, set apart from the other days as sacred to God.

In following God's example by resting on the Sabbath day, people imitate and associate themselves with God, even fellowship with him. Accordingly, for Israel observing the Sabbath was a sign of being God's people. The necessity for Christians to likewise observe it has been the subject of debate.

On finishing creation, God rested on the seventh day – and made it holy

Gen 2:2–3 *By the seventh day God finished the work he had been doing, so he rested from all his work.* [3]*God blessed the seventh day and made it a holy day, because on that day he rested from all the work he had done in creating the world.* NCV™

Keep the Sabbath holy by resting on it

Deut 5:13 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the* Lord *your God commanded you.* ESV

Ex 35:2a [Moses, to the Israelites:] In six days work may be done, but *on the seventh day there must be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of complete rest to the* Lord. NET

Observance of the Sabbath was given as a sign between God and his people Israel

Ex 31:16–17 [God:] *The Israelites must keep the Sabbath by observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.* [17]*It is a sign between me and the Israelites forever; for in six days the* Lord *made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.* NET

Doing as God had done was to be a sign that the Israelites were of God (v. 17), with them being his people and he being their God. These verses are also often interpreted to indicate that the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant with Israel at Sinai (cf. GNT, NLT).

Further reasons for keeping the Sabbath holy

Ex 20:8–11 [God, to the Israelites:] *Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy.* [9]*For six days you may labor and do all your work,* [10]*but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the* Lord *your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident foreigner who is in your gates.* [11]*For in six days the* Lord *made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the* Lord *blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.* NET

Verse 10a is in effect saying that the seventh day is a Sabbath "dedicated to" the Lord (GNT, NLT), in honor of him (cf. NCV NIrV). As such, observing the Sabbath honors God. Verse 11 appears to indicate that the Sabbath is to be observed to commemorate God's rest from his creative work and perhaps also his completion of it. Additionally there is the suggestion that humankind should – even needs to – follow God's example of resting on the Sabbath. Such an assertion seems only logical as they are made in his image (cf. Gen 1:26–27).

Ex 23:12 For *six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you must cease, in order that your ox and your donkey may rest and that your female servant's son and any hired help may refresh themselves.* NET

This points out that resting on the Sabbath enables people to "refresh themselves."

It is permissible to do good and necessary things on the Sabbath

Matt 12:10–13 A man was there who had a withered hand. And they asked Jesus, *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"* so that they could accuse him. [11]*He said to them, "Would not any one of you, if he had one sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, take hold of it and lift it out?* [12]*How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."* [13]*Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and it was restored, as healthy as the other.* NET

On the Sabbath God's people assemble for worship . . .

Lev 23:3a [Moses, to the Israelites:] You have six days in which to do your work, but remember that the seventh day, the Sabbath, is a day of rest. *On that day do not work, but gather for worship.* GNT

. . . During Sabbath worship there is teaching

Acts 17:2 Paul went to the Jews in the synagogue, as he customarily did, and *on three Sabbath days he addressed them from the scriptures, …* NET

Verses alleged to indicate that Christians do not need to keep the Sabbath

Col 2:16–17 [Paul, to believers:] Therefore *do not let anyone judge you with respect to* food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or *Sabbath days – [17]these are only the shadow of the things to come*, but the reality is Christ! NET

Rom 14:5–6 [Paul, referring to believers:] *One person regards one day holier than other days, and another regards them all alike. Each must be fully convinced in his own mind. [6]The one who observes the day* does it for the Lord. The one who eats, eats for the Lord because he gives thanks to God, and the one who abstains from eating abstains for the Lord, and he gives thanks to God. NET

> What Paul is referring to here is possibly inclusive of the Sabbath, although the reference to eating suggests that a special day of feasting may be what is foremost in view. Regarding contentious issues like those in question here, Paul is primarily concerned that: his readers be convinced in themselves (v. 5b), so they can act with a clear conscience; and the chosen course of action be taken for the Lord's honor (cf. CEV, GNT, NLT) and with thanksgiving (v. 6b).

Note: Early Christians met together on the first day of the week

1Cor 16:2 [Paul, to believers:] *On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come.* NET

> This verse is quite probably speaking of money being brought to Christian gatherings held on the first day of every week. The fact that the early Christians are recorded meeting together on the first day of the week – probably in view of Jesus rising from the dead on this day – has influenced most Christians to celebrate the Sabbath and meet for worship on this day rather than on the seventh day of the week.

c) Fasting

> Fasting involves abstaining from food and drink, though not necessarily water which provides no calories or energy. Ordained fasts in the OT were usually from sunrise to sunset. People who fast regularly today often do so once or twice a week, for one or two successive meal times. In the Wesleyan revival, fasting was observed from after the Thursday evening meal to mid-afternoon Friday. In the NT there are examples of fasting, but it is not commanded.

Fasting involves abstaining from food and drink, for a period of time

Est 4:16a [Esther, to Mordecai:] Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and *hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do.* ESV

Judg 20:26b They [the Israelites] sat there before the Lord and *fasted that day until evening;* and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. NKJV

Fasting can be done regularly – as an adjunct to prayer and worship

Luke 2:37 She [Anna] had lived as a widow since then for eighty–four years. She never left the temple, *worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.* NET

> Fasting implies and promotes earnestness in worship and prayer. When fasting, the ache and craving of hunger brings an earnestness and intensity to our worship and prayers. Fasting also promotes clarity of thought. Furthermore, our hunger serves as a reminder to worship and/or pray throughout the fasting period.

Fasting can be done on particular occasions, in petitioning God – as in seeking God's help . . .

Ezra 8:21, 23 [Ezra:] Then *I announced a fast there at the Ahava River so that we might humble ourselves in the presence of our God to ask him for a safe journey for ourselves, for our little ones, and for all our goods. ...* [23]*So we fasted and asked our God for a safe journey, and he answered our prayer.* GW

. . . or as in asking God to relent from punishing sin

Jonah 3:7–10 He [the king of Nineveh] issued a proclamation and said, "In Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles: *No human or animal, cattle or sheep, is to taste anything; they must not eat and they must not drink water.* [8]*Every person and animal must put on sackcloth and must cry earnestly to God*, and everyone must turn from their evil way of living and from the violence that they do. [9]Who knows? *Perhaps God might be willing to change his mind and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we might not die."* [10]When God saw their actions – they turned from their evil way of living! – God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened them with and he did not destroy them. NET

As such, fasting expresses one's distress in trouble or remorse over sin

Est 4:3 Throughout each and every province where the king's edict and law [to kill all Jews] were announced *there was considerable mourning among the Jews, along with fasting, weeping, and sorrow.* Sackcloth and ashes were characteristic of many. NET

Neh 9:1–2 On the twenty–fourth day of this same month the Israelites assembled; *they were fasting and wearing sackcloth, their heads covered with dust.* [2]Those truly of Israelite descent separated from all the foreigners, standing and *confessing their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.* NET

As per the subheading, these verses illustrate that fasting can express one's distress in trouble (Est 4:3) or one's remorse over sin (Neh 9:1–2).

Note: Fasting in itself is not significant

Isa 58:3–4 [The people, to God:] *'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'* [God:] *Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.* [4]*Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.* ESV

Godly fasting should be accompanied by such things as obedience to God and treating others appropriately. Without such conduct, fasting itself is of no significance.

d) The Laying on of Hands

In conveying the gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts 8:17 *Then Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit.* NET

Note that the laying on of hands to convey the gift of the Holy Spirit is generally done in conjunction with the recipients coming to faith – rather than at a time chosen by those performing the act. Also, it is not essential for a person to have hands laid on them for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

In conveying blessing

Mark 10:16 After he [Jesus] took the children in his arms, *he placed his hands on them and blessed them.* NET

Luke 24:50 Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and *lifting up his hands, he blessed them.* NET

Here a group of people (the disciples) is being blessed. So instead of hands being laid on each of them individually, the hands are used to convey blessing by being lifted towards the group.

In conveying God's healing

Acts 28:8 The father of Publius lay sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and *after praying, placed his hands on him and healed him.* NET

Those who have the gift of healing, generally convey God's healing through laying their hands on sick people – as Jesus often did.

In commissioning for ministry

Acts 13:2–3 While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, *"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* [3]*Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off.* NET

> Note that generally at least, the laying on of hands is done in conjunction with prayer (cf. Acts 28:8 ⇧).

Note: The OT use of oil to anoint and consecrate people for God's service

Ex 40:9, 13 [God, to Moses:] Then you shall *take the anointing oil* and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy. … [13]and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall *anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest*. ESV

2Ki 9:6 Jehu got up and went into the house. *The prophet poured olive oil on his head* and told him, "This is what the Lord God of Israel says: *I have anointed you king of the Lord's people, king of Israel*. GW

> In the OT, a person being ordained or inducted into a role in God's service – notably as a priest (cf. Ex 40:9, 13 ⇧), a prophet or a king (cf. 2Ki 9:6 ⇧) – was anointed with oil. It signified them being set apart by God and consecrated for such a role. This practice is imitated in some churches today, in commissioning people for ministry.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 30

Church Leadership

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I. General

Good leadership is one of the most important prerequisites for a healthy church. For a church to function effectively it is critical that leaders know and do what is required of them. It is also important for church members to know what they should expect of leaders – and how they can support their leaders.

Note that a number of verses in this chapter speak of Paul and other NT leaders in their work overseeing a number of churches, or of leaders of the nation of Israel – such as Moses, Joshua, prophets, priests and kings. Such verses are generally readily applicable to leaders of local churches today, and to their relationship with church members.

a) Introductory Insights

Churches have leaders

Acts 14:23 When they had *appointed elders for them in the various churches*, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed. NET

Ultimately it is God who chooses church leaders . . .

1Cor 12:28 And *God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers*, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ESV

Heb 5:1, 4 For *every high priest is taken from among the people and appointed to represent them before God*, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. … [4]And *no one assumes this honor on his own initiative, but only when called to it by God, as in fact Aaron was*. NET

What is said here of the position of high priest is arguably applicable to church leaders today. Note that it is not obvious whether the selecting and appointing spoken of in v. 1 is that done by God, or the actions taken by leaders in response to God's choice and calling (v. 4).

. . . Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit play a role in the making of leaders

2Cor 10:8 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH MEMBERS:] For if I boast somewhat more about *our authority that the Lord gave us for building you up* and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of doing so. NET

Acts 20:28 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH LEADERS:] Watch out for yourselves and for all *the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. NET

Leaders will be accountable to God for their work

Heb 13:17a [THE WRITER, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for *they keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work*. NET

Leaders will be richly rewarded for good work

Matt 24:45–47 [JESUS:] Who, then, is *the faithful and wise servant whom his master has put in charge of his household to give the others their food at the right time? [46]How blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing this when he comes! [47]I tell you with certainty, he will put him in charge of all his property.* ISV

This speaks of Jesus Christ (the "master") rewarding the servants whom he has put in charge of the church ("his household").

b) Required Characteristics

Godliness

Titus 1:7–8 For *the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God's work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain. [8]Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled*. NET

Wisdom and competence

Deut 1:13 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *Select wise and practical men, those known among your tribes, whom I may appoint as your leaders.* NET

Ex 18:21 But you *choose from the people capable men*, God–fearing, men of truth, those who hate bribes, *and put them over the people as rulers* of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. NET

Strength and courage

Josh 1:6 [God, to Joshua:] *Be strong and courageous, because you'll be leading this people* to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. ISV

Willingness to serve

1Pet 5:1b–2 [Peter, to leaders:] I appeal to you [2]*to be shepherds of the flock that God gave you and to take care of it willingly, as God wants you to, and not unwillingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve.* GNT

Leaders must be willing to serve God and Jesus Christ – and church members.

Deep love for church members

1Thes 2:8 [Paul, to church members:] *Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!* GNT

c) Managing the Church

See also:

- *e) Dealing with Sin in the Church*, p. 328

As a leader, provide good leadership

1Tim 5:17 Elders who *provide effective leadership* must be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. NET

Delegate work to capable people

Acts 6:1–4 Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. [2]So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, "*It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables.* [3]*But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well–attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task.* [4]But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." NET

Be gentle and sparing in the use of authority . . .

1Thes 2:7b [Paul, to church members:] Instead, *we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children.* ISV

Philem 1:8–9a [Paul, to church members:] For this reason, *although in the Messiah I have complete freedom to order you to do what is proper,* [9]*I prefer to make my appeal on the basis of love.* ISV

. . . but exercise authority where necessary

Titus 2:15 [Paul, to Titus:] So *communicate these things with the sort of exhortation or rebuke that carries full authority. Don't let anyone look down on you.* NET

Be an example for church members to imitate

2Thes 3:7–9 [Paul, to church members:] For you know yourselves how *you must imitate us, because we did not behave without discipline among you,* [8]*and we did not eat anyone's food without paying. Instead, in toil and drudgery we worked night and day in order not to burden any of you.* [9]It was not because we do not have that right, but *to give ourselves as an example for you to imitate.* NET

d) Caring for Church Members

See also:

- *II. Caring for the Body*, p. 289

Be a shepherd taking care of God's flock

Acts 20:28 [PAUL, TO LEADERS:] *Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. NET

John 21:16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." *Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."* NCV™

Pray for church members

Col 1:9 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *We have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. In fact, we always pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives.* CEV

Strengthen members in the faith

2Cor 12:19b [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] We are speaking in Christ before God, and *everything we do, dear friends, is to build you up.* NET

Follow up and pastor members

Acts 15:36, 41 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, *"Let's return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing." ...* [41]*He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.* NET

Work hard at helping church members

Col 4:13 [PAUL, SPEAKING TO COLOSSIAN CHURCH MEMBERS ABOUT EPAPHRAS:] For I can testify that *he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.* NET

Be prepared to suffer hardship for church members

2Tim 2:10 [PAUL:] So *I endure all things for the sake of those chosen by God*, that they too may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus and its eternal glory. NET

e) Dealing with Sin in the Church

> Confrontation and rebuke are needed when a church member sins and does not deal with it themselves. If confrontation and rebuke prove to be ineffective, then disassociation is required.

Confront church members over sin . . .

Ezek 16:2 [GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] Son of man, *confront Jerusalem with her abominable practices ...* NET

Matt 18:15–17 *If your brother sins, go and show him his fault when the two of you are alone. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother.* [16]*But if he does not listen, take one or two others with you, so that at the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established.* [17]*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.* If he refuses to listen to the church, treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector. NET

> These instructions are for believers or church members themselves in confronting fellow believers over sin. But the instructions are also applicable to leaders in their approach to confronting church members who have sinned and not repented.

. . . and warn them to stop sinning

Gal 5:21 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] ... envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. *I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!* NET

Expel unrepentant sinners . . .

1Cor 5:12–13 [PAUL:] [12-13]It is not my business to judge those who are not part of the church. God will judge them. But *you must judge the people who are part of the church. The Scripture says, "You must get rid of the evil person among you."* NCV™

Titus 3:10 [Paul, to Titus:] As for a person who stirs up division, *after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him*, ... ESV

. . . This is partly for the benefit of the offenders themselves

1Cor 5:4–5 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] When you have gathered together, I am with you in spirit. Then, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and with his power, [5]*hand such a person over to Satan to destroy his corrupt nature so that his spiritual nature may be saved on the day of the Lord*. GW

> The clause "hand such a person over to Satan" (v. 5) is commonly understood as meaning that the man was to be cast out of the church (cf. NLT) and so into the world, Satan's domain, open to affliction by him. The following clause – "to destroy his corrupt nature" probably means that affliction by Satan would act as a purifying process leading to the destruction of the man's sinful nature. Ultimately expelling such a person is done in the hope that they will be saved (v. 5b).

Have multiple witnesses in disciplinary procedures

Deut 19:15 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *One witness is not enough to convict a man of a crime; at least two witnesses are necessary to prove that a man is guilty.* GNT

Restoring a person who has sinned

2Cor 2:6–8 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] This punishment on such an individual by the majority is enough for him, [7]so that *now instead you should rather forgive and comfort him. This will keep him from being overwhelmed by excessive grief to the point of despair.* [8]*Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.* NET

Gal 6:1 [Paul:] Brothers and sisters, *if a person is discovered in some sin, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness. Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too.* NET

> Note that the above instructions appear to have in view people who have repented of their sin.

Note: Unchecked sin corrupts others

1Cor 5:6 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] Your boasting is not good. *Don't you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough?* NET

> The "yeast" signifies sin, which if not dealt with can spread throughout the whole church body.

f) Women in Leadership

In the OT Israelite nation, some women had roles as leaders

Judg 4:4 *Now Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.* NET

Mic 6:4 [God, to the Israelites:] In fact, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I delivered you from that place of slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and *Miriam to lead you*. NET

In the NT church, some women had significant ministerial roles

Rom 16:1–4 [Paul, to the Roman church:] Now I commend to you *our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea*, [2]so that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and provide her with whatever help she may need from you, for *she has been a great help to many, including me.* [3]*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus*, [4]who risked their own necks for my life. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. NET

Rom 16:6–7 [Paul, to the Roman church:] *Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you.* [7]*Greet Andronicus and Junias, my fellow Jews who are in prison with me and are prominent among the apostles. They were in the Messiah before I was.* ISV

> "Junias" (v. 7a) is a female name, often translated as "Junia"; some manuscripts even have "Julia". Being "prominent among the apostles" (v. 7b) may mean that Andronicus and Junias were considered outstanding by the apostles (cf. CEV) or that they were outstanding apostles (cf. NCV). If the latter is the case, then Paul would be using the term "apostle" in a broad sense, but it would still imply that Junias – a woman – had quite a significant leadership role within the church.

Controversial passages on women not speaking in church

1Cor 14:33b–35, 37 [Paul, to the Corinthian church:] *As in all the churches of the saints,* [34]*the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. Rather, let them be in submission, as in fact the law says.* [35]*If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home, because it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.* … [37]If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that *what I write to you is the Lord's command*. NET

1Tim 2:11–14 [Paul, to Timothy:] *Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.* [12]*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.* [13]*For Adam was formed first, then Eve;* [14]*and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor*. ESV

> Some take the above teaching on face value, understanding it to mean that women should remain silent in church and not be in positions of teaching or authority, as they are to be "in submission" (1Cor 14:34b) to their husbands. Others believe that in saying that women should remain silent in church, Paul has in view social norms of the day, where apparently it was considered disgraceful for a woman to speak in public. Another view is that these instructions were aimed at curbing noisy and disorderly church meetings – in particular disorderly expression of some spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church (cf. 1Cor 14:26–33a). A further viewpoint is that these instructions were regarding married women, and so not necessarily applicable to all women.

Note: The oneness and interdependence of women and men "in" Jesus Christ

Gal 3:28 [Paul, to the Galatian believers:] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*. NET

1Cor 11:11–12 In any case, *in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.* [12]*For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman*. But all things come from God. NET

> Paul sees women and men – and by association presumably also their roles – as being interdependent (v. 11), in accordance with their interdependence in nature (v. 12).

g) Church Members' Duties to Leaders

See also:

- *a) Pray for Each Other (I): General*, p. 289
- *b) Pray for Each Other (II): What to Ask*, p. 289
- *c) Encourage Each Other*, p. 290

Love your leaders

2Cor 8:7a [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in *your love for us*. GNT

Respect your leaders

1Thes 5:12–13 [Paul, to believers:] We ask you, brothers, *to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,* [13]*and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.* Be at peace among yourselves. ESV

Listen to your leaders and their teaching

Acts 10:33b [Cornelius, to Peter:] So now *we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us*. NET

Obey your leaders

Heb 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls*, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. ESV

Give your leaders material support . . .

Gal 6:6 Now *the one who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the one who teaches it*. NET

. . . Leaders deserve material support

1Cor 9:4, 7 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] *Do we not have the right to financial support?* … [7]*Who ever serves in the army at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not consume its milk?* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Teaching in the Church

Teaching is one of the main roles of most church leaders. Good teaching is based on God's word, and should be delivered in accordance with the directions and sound examples found in Scripture. On the topic of teaching, one must also be aware of the characteristics of "false" teachers who are so often present in the church, so as to recognize them and deal with them.

a) What to Teach: God's Word

Teach and preach God's word

2Tim 3:16–17 *Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* [17]that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work. NET

2Tim 4:2a [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Preach the word!* NKJV

Teach God's commands and ways

Ex 18:20 [JETHRO, TO MOSES:] *You should teach them God's commands and explain to them how they should live and what they should do.* GNT

Teach the truths of the faith

1Tim 4:6 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *By pointing out such things to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, having nourished yourself on the words of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.* NET

In v. 6a Paul exhorts Timothy to instruct the believers in the things that he had been writing about. These things were composed of or in line with the "words" or truths of the faith and the good teaching that Timothy himself had followed (v. 6b).

Read God's word in church assemblies

1Tim 4:13 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] Until I get there, *concentrate on reading Scripture in worship,* giving encouraging messages, and teaching people. GW

Josh 8:35 *Joshua read aloud every commandment Moses had given before the whole assembly of Israel,* including the women, children, and resident foreigners who lived among them. NET

Use God's word as the authoritative standard in determining what is true . . .

Acts 17:11b The Bereans were eager to hear what Paul and Silas said and *studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true.* NCV™

. . . and use God's word in determining what actions are legitimate

Matt 19:3–6 Then some Pharisees came to him [Jesus] in order to test him. *They asked, "Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?"* [4]*He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female,* [5]*and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?* [6]*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* NET

Luke 4:5–8 Then the devil led him [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in a flash all the kingdoms of the world. [6]And he said to him, "To you I will grant this whole realm – and the glory that goes along with it, for it has been relinquished to me, and I can give it to anyone I wish. [7]*So then, if you will worship me, all this will be yours."* [8]*Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"* NET

Note: Do not add to or subtract from God's word – nor distort it

Deut 4:2 [MOSES:] *Do not add a thing to what I command you nor subtract from it,* so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am delivering to you. NET

2Cor 4:2a [PAUL:] Instead, we have refused to use secret and shameful ways. *We don't use tricks, and we don't distort God's word.* As God watches, we clearly reveal the truth to everyone. GW

b) How to Teach

Explain God's word and truths

Neh 8:7–8 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah – all of whom were Levites – *were teaching the people the law, as the people remained standing.* [8]*They read from the book of God's law, explaining it and imparting insight.* Thus the people gained understanding from what was read. NET

Acts 28:23b From morning until evening *he* [Paul] *continued to explain the kingdom of God to them*, trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the Prophets. ISV

Where applicable, use illustrations in teaching

1Cor 9:24–25 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *You know that many runners enter a race, and only one of them wins the prize. So run to win!* [25]*Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last, but we do it for a crown that will last forever.* CEV

> Here Paul likens the Christian life and the reward of the afterlife to a race and its prize – to emphasize the focus, determination and discipline required.

Do not teach beyond what the hearers can understand

2Cor 1:13a [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] For *we do not write you anything other than what you can read and also understand*. NET

Mark 4:33 Jesus used many other stories when he spoke to the people, and *he taught them as much as they could understand*. CEV

The manner in which to teach

Titus 2:7b–8 [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH LEADER TITUS:] *Be sincere and serious in your teaching.* [8]*Use sound words that cannot be criticized*, so that your enemies may be put to shame by not having anything bad to say about us. GNT

2Tim 4:2b [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Be very patient when you teach.* GW

The teaching needs to be correct . . .

Titus 2:1 [PAUL, TO TITUS:] But *you must teach what agrees with sound doctrine*. GNT

. . . and the teaching needs to be complete

Acts 20:27 [PAUL:] *I have told you everything God wants you to know.* CEV

Keep reminding church members of teachings

2Pet 1:12–15 [PETER:] Therefore, *I intend to keep on reminding you about these things, even though you already know them and are firmly established in the truth that you now have.* [13]*Yet I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I am living* in this bodily tent, [14]because I know that the removal of my bodily tent will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, has shown me. [15]And *I will make every effort to see that you will always remember these things* after I am gone. ISV

Note: Church members can themselves instruct one another

Rom 15:14 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN BELIEVERS:] But I myself am fully convinced about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and *able to instruct one another*. NET

> The phrase "filled with all knowledge" suggests that the Roman believers were amply filled with spiritual knowledge (cf. AMP). Thus, such believers are competent to instruct each other.

c) Traits of False Teachers (I): Their Teaching

See also:

- *F*, p. 335

- *F*, p. 335

  Note that also included in this and the following sections on false teachers are verses regarding false prophets, ungodly priests and other ungodly religious leaders, including Pharisees. For similar to false teachers in the church, all these were in positions of spiritual authority amongst God's people and taught misleading things.

False teachers speak lies and delusions of their own, in God's name

Jer 14:14 [JEREMIAH:] Then the LORD said to me, "*Those* [false] *prophets are prophesying lies while claiming my authority!* I did not send them. I did not commission them. I did not speak to them. *They are prophesying to these people false visions, worthless predictions, and the delusions of their own mind.* NET

Their teaching is hollow – of worldly, human origin

Col 2:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an *empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.* NET

The phrase "the elemental spirits of the world" likely refers either to evil spirits who have great influence on the thinking of the world or to "the basic principles of the world" (ISV).

False teachers say what their listeners like to hear – appealing and pleasant things . . .

2Pet 2:18–19 For *by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery,* people who have just escaped from those who reside in error. [19]Although *these false teachers promise such people freedom,* they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved. NET

Jer 23:16b–17 [JEREMIAH, WARNING HIS PEOPLE ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS:] *They are filling you with false hopes.* They are reporting visions of their own imaginations, not something the LORD has given them to say. [17]*They continually say to those who reject what the LORD has said, 'Things will go well for you!' They say to all those who follow the stubborn inclinations of their own hearts, 'Nothing bad will happen to you!'* NET

. . . False teachers do not confront their listeners with their sin

Lam 2:14a [JEREMIAH, TO JERUSALEM AND HER PEOPLE:] Your prophets saw visions for you that were worthless lies. *They failed to expose your sin* so as to restore your fortunes. NET

False teachers teach different doctrine to what is correct

1Tim 1:3 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may *charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ...* ESV

False teachers distort the truth

2Pet 3:16b [PETER, REFERRING TO PAUL'S LETTERS:] Some things in these letters are hard to understand, *things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures.* NET

False teachers typically deny Jesus Christ

1Jn 2:22 *Who, then, is the liar? It is those who say that Jesus is not the Messiah. Such people are the Enemies of Christ—they reject both the Father and the Son.* GNT

False teachers (in view here) typically deny or dilute key aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Other notes about the teaching of false teachers

Col 2:18b *That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen,* but he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind. NET

Jude 1:10a But *these people attack with insults anything they do not understand ...* GNT

Note: False teachers and their teaching are savage and destructive

Acts 20:29–30 [Paul, to people from the Ephesian church:] I know that when I'm gone *savage wolves will come among you and not spare the flock.* 30*Indeed, some of your own men will come forward and distort the truth in order to lure the disciples into following them.* ISV

d) Traits of False Teachers (II): Characteristics

The consciences and minds of false teachers are corrupted

1Tim 4:2a They [unfaithful people] will also be fooled by the false claims of *liars whose consciences have lost all feeling*. CEV

1Tim 6:4–5 This gives rise to envy, dissension, slanders, evil suspicions, 5and constant bickering by *people corrupted in their minds and deprived of the truth*, who suppose that godliness is a way of making a profit. NET

Here "people" appears to primarily refer to false teachers (cf. v. 3), "people corrupted in their minds".

False teachers typically follow their sinful desires

Jude 1:18–19 They [the apostles] said to you [believers], "When the last days come, *people will appear who will mock you, people who follow their own godless desires."* 19*These are the people who cause divisions, who are controlled by their natural desires*, who do not have the Spirit. GNT

False teachers are primarily in view here.

False teachers are generally greedy for personal gain

2Pet 2:3a [Peter, to believers:] *In their greed these false teachers will make a profit out of telling you made-up stories.* GNT

False teachers are deceitful

2Cor 11:13–15 For *such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.* 14And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15Therefore *it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness*, whose end will correspond to their actions. NET

False teachers are often arrogant and contemptuous

2Pet 2:10b *These false teachers are bold and arrogant, and show no respect for the glorious beings above; instead, they insult them.* GNT

False teachers lack understanding

1Tim 1:7 They [false teachers] want to be teachers of the law, but *they do not understand what they are saying or the things they insist on so confidently.* NET

Matt 15:14 Leave them! *They are blind guides.* If someone who is blind leads another who is blind, both will fall into a pit. NET

The Pharisees were spiritually blind. As such they lacked insight and mislead others.

Note: False teachers stand condemned

Matt 23:13, 33 [Jesus:] But *woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites!* You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in. … 33You snakes, you offspring of vipers! *How will you escape being condemned to hell?* NET

e) Guarding against False Teachers

Watch out for false teachers and their teaching . . .

Matt 7:15 *Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves.* NET

. . . Do not be deceived by false teachers

Eph 5:6 *Let nobody deceive you with empty words*, for because of these things God's wrath comes on the sons of disobedience. NET

Test teachers by comparing their teaching with the Scriptures

Acts 17:11 The people of Berea were more open-minded than the people of Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive God's message, and *every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true*. GW

False teachers can also be recognized by their "fruit" and actions

Matt 7:16–18 *You will recognize them by their fruit.* Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? [17]In the same way, *every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit*. [18]A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. NET

1Jn 3:7–8a, 10 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Little children, *let no one deceive you: The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous.* [8]*The one who practices sin is of the devil*, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. … [10]*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: Everyone who does not practice righteousness – the one who does not love his fellow Christian – is not of God.* NET

John appears to primarily have in view recognizing false teachers (cf. 2:18–26).

Do not tolerate false teachers and their teaching . . .

Rev 2:2 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS:] I know what you do, how you work hard and never give up. *I know you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people. You have tested those who say they are apostles but really are not, and you found they are liars.* NCV™

. . . Have nothing to do with false teachers

2Tim 3:5 Even though they will make a show of being religious, their religion won't be real. *Don't have anything to do with such people.* CEV

Note: False teachers often succeed in leading people astray

2Pet 2:2 And *many will follow their debauched lifestyles*. Because of *these false teachers*, the way of truth will be slandered. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

Unit G

Relating to People

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CHAPTER 31

Love

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I. Loving Qualities

The importance of love could hardly be more emphatically stated by the Bible. Love should encompass every area of our lives and be the basis of all that we do in relating to people. Other personal qualities reflective of love are also regularly applicable in our relationships with other people (and are also discussed in this section).

Note that the teaching in this and the subsequent chapters in *Part G. Relating to People* is also relevant to the preceding part of this book, *Part F. Church Life*.

a) Love

See also:

- *d) Love Each Other (I): General*, p. 286
- *e) Love Each Other (II): How*, p. 287

What love is

1Cor 13:4–7 *Love is patient, love is kind, it is not envious. Love does not brag, it is not puffed up.* [5]*It is not rude, it is not self–serving, it is not easily angered or resentful.* [6]*It is not glad about injustice, but rejoices in the truth.* [7]*It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* NET

In v. 7, "believes all things, hopes all things" means that love: "...is ever ready to believe the best of every person" and that "its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances..." (AMP).

1Jn 3:16–18 *This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brothers and sisters!* [17]Rich people who see a brother or sister in need, yet close their hearts against them, cannot claim that they love God. [18]My children, *our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.* GNT

Jesus Christ exemplified love for us (v. 16) and so we should emulate him by living sacrificially for others. As such, we should not merely love with words but with actions and sincerity (vv. 17–18).

The supremacy of love

Mark 12:28–33 Now one of the experts in the law came and heard them debating. When he saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, *"Which commandment is the most important of all?"* [29]*Jesus answered, "The most important is:* 'Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30]*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* [31]*The second is: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* [32]The expert in the law said to him, "That is true, Teacher; you are right to say that he is one, and there is no one else besides him. [33]And *to love him with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."* NET

1Cor 12:31b; 13:1–3, 13 [PAUL:] And now I will show you *a way that is beyond comparison.* [13:1]*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* [2]*And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.* [3]*If I give away everything I own, and if I give over my body in order to boast, but do not have love, I receive no benefit. ...* [13]*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.* NET

Live a life of love . . .

2Jn 1:6b As you have heard from the beginning, *his* [God's] *command is this: Live a life of love.* NCV™

Eph 5:2 *Live in love as Christ also loved us.* He gave his life for us as an offering and sacrifice, a soothing aroma to God. GW

. . . Do things in love

1Cor 16:14 *Everything you do should be done in love.* NET

Love others as you love yourself . . .

Lev 19:18 Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but *love your neighbor as you love yourself*. I am the LORD. GNT

. . . "Love your neighbor as yourself" sums up God's law

Rom 13:8–10 Owe no one anything, except to *love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* [9]*For the commandments, "Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet," (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, "Love your neighbor as yourself."* [10]*Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* NET

> The whole moral law – all that involves our relationships with other people – is summed up by the command to love others as we love ourselves. In doing so, we fulfill or carry out the law.

Love your enemies and do good to them

Luke 6:27–28, 31 [JESUS:] But I say to you who are listening: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,* [28]*bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ...* [31]*Treat others in the same way that you would want them to treat you.* NET

b) Generosity

Be generous

1Tim 6:18 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to *be generous givers, sharing with others*. NET

Prov 21:26 All day long he [a lazy person] continues to crave, while *the righteous one gives without holding back*. ISV

Lend to others

Deut 15:8 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Be generous to these poor people, and freely lend them as much as they need. Never be hard-hearted and tight-fisted with them.* GW

Share with others

Luke 3:11 John answered them, *"The person who has two tunics must share with the person who has none, and the person who has food must do likewise."* NET

Heb 13:16 And do not neglect to do good and to *share what you have, for God is pleased with such sacrifices*. NET

Practice hospitality

Rom 12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and *seek to show hospitality*. ESV

Heb 13:2 *Be sure to welcome strangers into your home. By doing this, some people have welcomed angels as guests, without even knowing it.* CEV

Generosity actually brings oneself great blessing

Luke 6:38 *Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive.* NET

Acts 20:35 [PAUL TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS:] By all these things, I have shown you that by working in this way we must help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, *'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* NET

c) Mercy

> Mercy involves such things as: not penalizing those subject to one's judgment and retribution (due to things like wrongful action or debt); and doing more than one is bound to do in helping others. It is showing kindness beyond what is required of one or is otherwise considered fitting.

Show mercy

Zec 7:9b You must see that justice is done, and must *show kindness and mercy to one another*. GNT

Luke 6:36 *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.* NET

Be merciful and God will show you mercy

Matt 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.* NET

The final clause refers, primarily at least, to being shown mercy by God.

Be compassionate

Col 3:12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, *you must clothe yourselves with compassion*, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. GNT

Compassion is generally the emotion underlying mercy; it is expressed in merciful action.

Forgive others . . .

Luke 17:3–4 Watch yourselves! *If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him.* [4]*Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.* NET

Col 3:13 Get along with each other, and *forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you.* NCV™

. . . Forgive and God will forgive you

Matt 6:14–15 *If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you.* [15]*But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.* CEV

Do not judge others . . .

James 4:12 But there is only one who is lawgiver and judge – the one who is able to save and destroy. On the other hand, *who are you to judge your neighbor?* NET

We are not to judge others in a condemnatory manner, as if we were in some position of authority to do so; nor in a self-righteous sense, which is inevitably hypocritical. Note, however, that there are Bible verses instructing us to make judgments or choices regarding good and bad people or things.

. . . If you judge others, God will judge you accordingly

Matt 7:1–2 *Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you,* [2]*for God will judge you in the same way as you judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others.* GNT

We will all face God's judgment but the above passage speaks of the same condemnatory standard of judgment being applied by God to those who exercise it themselves.

Note: Human judgment is typically superficial and inadequate, in contrast to God's judgment

1Sam 16:6–7 When they arrived, *Samuel noticed Eliab and said to himself, "Surely, here before the LORD stands his chosen king!"* [7]*But the LORD said to Samuel, "Don't be impressed by his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. God does not view things the way men do. People look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* NET

d) Gentleness

See also:

- *d) Antithesis of Pride: Humility*, p. 414

Be gentle

Phil 4:5a *Let everyone see your gentleness.* NET

1Pet 3:3–4 [PETER, ADDRESSING WIVES:] Your beauty should not be an external one, consisting of braided hair or the wearing of gold ornaments and dresses. [4]Instead, it should be the inner disposition of the heart, consisting in *the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great value in the sight of God*. ISV

Be patient

Eph 4:1–2 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called, [2]with all humility and gentleness, *with patience, bearing with one another in love, ...* NET

1Thes 5:14b [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Encourage anyone who feels left out, help all who are weak, and *be patient with everyone*. CEV

Be meek . . .

Matt 5:38–42 [JESUS:] *You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' [39]But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. But whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him as well. [40]And if someone wants to sue you and to take your tunic, give him your coat also. [41]And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. [42]Give to the one who asks you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow from you.* NET

> The concept of "meekness" involves an approach of non-retaliation and even non-resistance in the face of offences. It is characterized by humility and gentleness.
>
> The command "do not resist the evildoer" (v. 39a) is given in respect to one's own rights; it is not saying that we should not stand against an evil person on behalf of others. The illustrations that follow (vv. 39b–42) show that one should not retaliate and not insist on one's rights. Some commentators view these as hyperbole, while others consider such a view to be watering down the extent of what is being taught.

. . . Do not take revenge, but instead wait for God to act

Rom 12:19 *Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me. I will pay them back, declares the Lord."* ISV

Prov 20:22 *Don't say, "I'll pay you back for the wrong you did." Wait for the LORD, and he will make things right.* NCV™

Seek peace, including peace with others . . .

Ps 34:14 Turn away from evil and do good; *seek peace and pursue it*. ESV

Rom 12:18 *Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.* GNT

. . . and seek peace amongst others

Prov 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but *those who promote peace have joy*. NET

Matt 5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.* NET

> People who "work for peace" (GNT, NLT, cf. NCV) will be deemed to be children of God because they show that they partake of his nature.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Antitheses of Love

We have various tendencies that work counter to love. These largely involve selfish attitudes and ill feelings – along with the adverse speech and actions that they produce. These greatly inhibit and harm our relationships with others, and must be avoided.

a) Selfish Attitudes

Do not pursue selfish ends

Phil 2:3a *Don't act out of selfish ambition* or be conceited. GW

Rom 2:8 ... but *for those who are self-seeking* and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, *there will be wrath and fury*. ESV

Do not be greedy

Matt 23:25 *How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees!* You hypocrites! You clean the outside of cups and dishes. But *inside they are full of greed* and uncontrolled desires. GW

Prov 28:25 *A greedy man stirs up strife*, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched. ESV

Do not covet

Ex 20:17 *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."* ESV

We are not to crave or desire anything that belongs to another person.

Seek the interests of others before your own . . .

1Cor 10:24, 33 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *None of you should be looking to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ... [33]Just do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved.* GNT

. . . Do so even at great cost to yourself, as Jesus Christ did

2Cor 8:9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For you know the grace of *our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that you by his poverty could become rich*. NET

Ruth 2:11 Boaz replied to her [Ruth], "I have been given a full report of *all that you have done for your mother–in–law following the death of your husband – how you left your father and your mother, as well as your homeland, and came to live among people you did not know previously*. NET

b) Ill Feelings

Control and avoid anger

Eph 4:26–27, 31 *When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day. [27]Do not give the devil a way to defeat you. ... [31]Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily* or say things to hurt others. Never do anything evil. NCV™

James 1:19–20 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! *Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. [20]For human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.* NET

Do not hate

Lev 19:17a *You must not hate your fellow citizen in your heart.* NCV™

1Jn 4:20 *If anyone says "I love God" and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar, because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.* NET

Get rid of bitterness and malice

Eph 4:31 *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ESV

Do not be jealous . . .

Rom 13:13 Let us live decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, *not in discord and jealousy*. NET

Prov 27:4 Wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming, but *who can stand before jealousy*? NET

> Here "who" may refer to the one who is jealous, rather than the one who is the object of the jealousy. Jealousy has an irresistible, detrimental effect on those in whom it abides – as does envy (cf. Prov 14:30 ⇩).

. . . Do not envy

1Cor 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind, *it is not envious*. Love does not brag, it is not puffed up. NET

Prov 14:30 A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but *envy makes the bones rot*. ESV

Do not show contempt

Prov 18:3 *When wickedness comes, contempt comes also*, and with dishonor comes disgrace. ESV

> This shows the evil nature of contempt, indicating that it is or can be bred by wickedness. Note that "contempt" means to regard someone (or something) as inferior, insignificant or foolish.

c) Adverse Speech

Do not quarrel

Prov 17:14, 19a *Starting a quarrel is like a leak in a dam, so stop it before a fight breaks out. …* [19]*Whoever loves to argue loves to sin.* NCV™

Do not curse

Rom 12:14 Bless those who persecute you, *bless and do not curse*. NET

James 3:9–10 [James, to believers:] *With it* [the tongue] *we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in God's image.* [10]*From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters.* NET

Do not mock

Ps 1:1 *Blessed is the person who does not* follow the advice of wicked people, take the path of sinners, or *join the company of mockers*. GW

Do not slander

1Pet 2:1 *So get rid of* all evil and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and *all slander*. NET

Do not gossip

Prov 16:28 A perverse person spreads dissension, and *a gossip separates the closest friends*. NET

Do not grumble, particularly against others

Phil 2:14–15 [Paul, to believers:] *Do everything without grumbling or arguing,* [15]*so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world …* NET

James 5:9 [James, to believers:] *Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged.* See, the judge stands before the gates! NET

> Grumbling or complaining against others is an outward expression of inner condemnatory judgment of them – which leaves oneself open to such judgment.

d) Adverse Force

Do not use violence . . .

Jonah 3:8 [The king of Nineveh:] Every person and animal must put on sackcloth and must cry earnestly to God, and *everyone must turn from their evil way of living and from the violence that they do*. NET

. . . God hates and punishes violence

Mal 2:16a "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel. *"I hate the person who covers himself with violence," says the LORD of Armies.* GW

Ezek 7:23 [GOD:] *Make chains for captives, because the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence.* NCV™

God would punish his people's violence with captivity.

Do not murder

Ex 20:13 *You shall not murder.* NET

Do not rape

Deut 22:25 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] But *if the man came across the engaged woman in the field and overpowered her and raped her, then only the rapist must die.* NET

The NT does not propagate the death penalty. Nevertheless its mention in regard to such actions (cf. 24:7 ⇩) serves to illustrate the seriousness of the crime.

Do not kidnap

Deut 24:7 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If a man is found kidnapping a person from among his fellow Israelites, and regards him as mere property and sells him, that kidnapper must die.* In this way you will purge evil from among you. NET

Do not oppress

Ezek 45:9 Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! *Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness. Cease your evictions of my people,* declares the Lord GOD. ESV

Ezek 18:7a *He* [a righteous person] *doesn't oppress anyone.* GW

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 32

Justice

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I. Justice in Action

Topics encompassed by the theme of justice together form a very large proportion of what the Bible says about how to relate to other people. It is essential that we incorporate the Bible's teaching on these topics into our own lives. In doing so, we must be mindful that acting justly involves not only doing what is right ourselves; it also involves ensuring that others are treated fairly – notably the needy.

a) Do What Is Just and Right

Practice justice and so act justly

Deut 16:20 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *You must pursue justice alone* so that you may live and inherit the land the Lord your God is giving you. NET

Mic 6:8 No, the Lord has told us what is good. *What he requires of us is this: to do what is just*, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God. GNT

Do what is right . . .

Isa 1:17 [God:] *Learn to do what is right! Promote justice!* Give the oppressed reason to celebrate! Take up the cause of the orphan! Defend the rights of the widow! NET

Prov 21:3 *To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.* ISV

. . . Do no wrong to others

Ps 15:2b–3 [David, speaking of righteous people:] Such people speak the truth from their hearts [3]and do not tell lies about others. *They do no wrong to their neighbors* and do not gossip. NCV™

Strive to do what is right in the eyes of both God and people

2Cor 8:21 [Paul:] *We intend to do what is right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of people.* ISV

Acting justly brings blessing

Ps 106:3 *Blessed are those who defend justice and do what is right at all times.* GW

Ps 112:5 *It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.* ESV

Injustice brings God's judgment

Ezek 9:9b–10 [God:] "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is extremely great; *the land is full of murder, and the city is full of corruption*, for they say, 'The Lord has abandoned the land, and the Lord does not see!' [10]But as for me, *my eye will not pity them nor will I spare them; I hereby repay them for what they have done.*" NET

b) Administering Justice

Administer and maintain justice

Jer 21:12 *Each new day, make sure that justice is done, and rescue those who are being robbed.* Or else my anger will flame up like a fire that never goes out. CEV

Isa 56:1 This is what the Lord says: *Preserve justice*, and do what is right. My salvation is about to come. My righteousness is about to be revealed. GW

Judge justly

Zec 8:16b [God, to the people of Judah:] *Practice true and righteous judgment in your courts.* NET

Do not show favoritism in judging . . .

Lev 19:15 [God, to the Israelites:] *You must not deal unjustly in judgment: you must neither show partiality to the poor nor honor the rich. You must judge your fellow citizen fairly.* NET

. . . Nor show favoritism in other matters

1Tim 5:21 [Paul, to Timothy:] Before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, I solemnly charge you to *carry out these commands without prejudice or favoritism of any kind*. NET

Further instructions about legal judgments

Ezek 44:24a [God:] In all disputes the priests must act as judges and *make decisions based on my laws.* GW

Deut 19:15 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *One witness is not enough to convict a man of a crime; at least two witnesses are necessary to prove that a man is guilty.* GNT

John 7:51 [Nicodemus:] *"Our law doesn't condemn a man unless it first hears from him and learns what he is doing, does it?"* NET

A person must not be condemned without first being given a hearing.

Have the same laws for foreigners as for the native-born

Lev 24:22 [God, to the Israelites:] *"'The law will be the same for the foreigner as for those from your own country. I am the Lord your God.'"* NCV™

Note: Avoid going to court

Matt 5:25 *If someone brings a lawsuit against you and takes you to court, settle the dispute with him while there is time, before you get to court. Once you are there, he will hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to the police, and you will be put in jail.* GNT

c) Justice and the Needy (I): Instructions

Being created by God and in the image of God, all people have the right to be treated justly and to live without poverty. As such, aiding the needy and fighting poverty are very much matters of justice, not merely charity.

Do not mistreat the needy

Zec 7:10 *You must not oppress the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, or the poor,* nor should anyone secretly plot evil against his fellow human being. NET

Defend the cause of the needy

Ps 82:3–4 *Defend the weak and the orphans; defend the rights of the poor and suffering.* [4]*Save the weak and helpless; free them from the power of the wicked.* NCV™

Prov 31:8–9 *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing.* [9]*Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy."* NCV™

Give to the needy . . .

Acts 10:2 Cornelius was a religious man. He and all the other people who lived in his house worshiped the true God. *He gave much of his money to the poor* and prayed to God often. NCV™

. . . Provide the needy with food and clothing

Luke 3:11 John answered them, *"The person who has two tunics must share with the person who has none, and the person who has food must do likewise."* NET

Acts 9:36, 39 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas). *She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity.* ... [39]So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived they brought him to the upper room. *All the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them.* NET

Even sell your possessions so as to give to the poor

Luke 12:33 [Jesus:] *Sell your possessions and give to the poor.* Provide yourselves purses that do not wear out – a treasure in heaven that never decreases, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. NET

Acts 2:45 *They* [the believers] *made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods and to distribute the proceeds to anyone who was in need.* ISV

Note: Treat foreigners the same as your native-born

Lev 19:34 *The foreigner who resides with you must be to you like a native citizen among you; so you must love him as yourself*, because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God. NET

Note that in Israel foreigners (or aliens) were generally seen as being vulnerable and needy (cf. Zec 7:10 ⇧).

d) Justice and the Needy (II): Insights

Defending and providing for the needy are a vital part of true religion

Jer 22:15b–16a [GOD, REFERRING TO KING JOSIAH:] *He always did right— he gave justice to the poor and was honest.* [16]*That's what it means to truly know me.* CEV

James 1:27 *Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune* and to keep oneself unstained by the world. NET

Providing for the needy is associated with righteousness

Matt 25:37–40 *Then the righteous will answer him* [the king, Jesus Christ], *'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?* [38]*When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you?* [39]*When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'* [40]*And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.'* NET

Meeting the needs of "these brothers or sisters of mine" (v. 40) is correlated here with being identified as "righteous" (v. 37; cf. v. 46). Note that "these brothers of mine" probably refers primarily to Christians, here obviously ones who had been in need.

Providing for the needy brings oneself blessing . . .

Prov 19:17 *The one who is gracious to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD will repay him for his good deed.* NET

Luke 6:38 [JESUS:] *Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive.* NET

Quite possibly Jesus has giving to the poor primarily in view. This teaching is at least inclusive of it.

. . . but giving to the needy must be done in an appropriate manner

Matt 6:1–4 [JESUS:] *Be careful! When you do good things, don't do them in front of people to be seen by them. If you do that, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.* [2]*"When you give to the poor, don't be like the hypocrites. They blow trumpets in the synagogues and on the streets so that people will see them and honor them. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward.* [3]*So when you give to the poor, don't let anyone know what you are doing.* [4]*Your giving should be done in secret. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you.* NCV™

Blessings include one's own needs being met . . .

Ps 41:1 *How blessed is the one who treats the poor properly! When trouble comes, the LORD delivers him.* NET

2Cor 9:7–8 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver. [8]And *God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times*, you will overflow in every good work. NET

Those who give to the needy will be blessed by God with all that they need. This includes what they need for themselves, as well as for "every good work", such as further giving to others.

. . . There will also be reward in the afterlife

1Tim 6:18–19 [Paul, instructing Timothy what to teach believers:] Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to *be generous givers, sharing with others.* [19]*In this way they will save up a treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the future and so lay hold of what is truly life.* NET

The phrase "the future" (v. 19) appears to have the afterlife in view (cf. NIV).

God will punish those who mistreat the needy

Prov 22:22–23 *Do not exploit a poor person because he is poor and do not crush the needy in court,* [23]*for the Lord will plead their case and will rob those who are robbing them.* NET

Ezek 22:29, 31 [God:] The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. *They have wronged the poor and needy; they have oppressed the foreigner who lives among them and denied them justice. ...* [31]*So I have poured my anger on them, and destroyed them with the fire of my fury. I hereby repay them for what they have done, declares the sovereign Lord.* NET

God will punish those who ignore the needy

Matt 25:41–46 "Then *he* [Jesus Christ] *will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!* [42]*For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.* [43]*I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'* [44]*Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?'* [45]*Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.'* [46]*And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* NET

e) OT Structured Provisions for the Needy

Although some of the OT structured provisions for the needy in Israel may not be readily applicable in modern societies, they nevertheless provide principles and concepts that are relevant to all societies.

The providing of produce for the needy

Lev 19:9–10 *When you harvest your grain, always leave some of it standing along the edges of your fields and don't pick up what falls on the ground.* [10]*Don't strip your grapevines clean or gather the grapes that fall off the vines. Leave them for the poor and for those foreigners who live among you. I am the Lord your God.* CEV

Deut 26:12 Every year you are to give ten percent of your harvest to the Lord. But *every third year, this ten percent must be given to the poor who live in your town, including Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. That way, they will have enough to eat.* CEV

The prohibiting of taking interest or profit from the poor

Lev 25:35–37 *If your brother becomes impoverished* and is indebted to you, you must support him; he must live with you like a foreign resident. [36]*Do not take interest or profit from him,* but you must fear your God and your brother must live with you. [37]*You must not lend him your money at interest and you must not sell him food for profit.* NET

The canceling of fellow Israelites' debts every seven years

Deut 15:1–2 *At the end of every seven years you must declare a cancellation of debts.* [2]*This is the nature of the cancellation: Every creditor must remit what he has loaned to another person; he must not force payment from his fellow Israelite, for it is to be recognized as "the Lord's cancellation of debts."* NET

The release of Israelite servants every seven years

Deut 15:12 If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and *in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you*. ESV

The year of jubilee

Lev 25:10 So *you must consecrate the fiftieth year, and you must proclaim a release in the land for all its inhabitants. That year will be your jubilee; each one of you must return to his property and each one of you must return to his clan*. NET

> In the year of jubilee there was to be "a release" for those who were in bondage. As such, poor people were able to return to and reclaim ancestral property that they had sold (cf. vv. 28, 31, 33), and any poor person who had sold himself to work for another (cf. v. 39) was to be released (cf. vv. 40–41).

The right of redemption for Israelite servants and of ancestral land

Lev 25:47–49 If a resident foreigner who is with you prospers and *your brother becomes impoverished with regard to him so that he sells himself to a resident foreigner who is with you or to a member of a foreigner's family,* [48]*after he has sold himself he retains a right of redemption. One of his brothers may redeem him,* [49]*or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or anyone of the rest of his blood relatives – his family – may redeem him, or if he prospers he may redeem himself.* NET

Lev 25:23–24 [GOD:] The land must not be sold without reclaim because the land belongs to me, for you are foreigners and residents with me. [24]In all your landed property *you must provide for the right of redemption of the land*. NET

> Israelite servants (cf. Lev 25:47–49) and ancestral land (cf. Lev 25:23–24) could be redeemed (i.e. bought back) at any time for an appropriate price.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Being True

In order to do what is right in our relationships with others, we must be true – both faithful and truthful. It is important to remember that faithfulness and truth – with the trust that they generate – are absolutely essential for our relationships with others to work, for so many aspects of our relationships are dependent on them. Accordingly we must avoid deceitfulness and associated dishonest practices. Bear in mind that deceitfulness is arguably the prime characteristic of Satan and evil.

a) Faithfulness

Be faithful

Prov 3:3–4 *Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness. Tie them round your neck; write them on your heart.* [4]*If you do this, both God and people will be pleased with you.* GNT

Matt 23:23 [Jesus:] Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You give a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you neglect *what is more important in the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness! You should have done these things* without neglecting the others. NET

Be trustworthy and reliable

1Tim 3:11 In the same way, women must be respected by others. They must not speak evil of others. They must be self-controlled and *trustworthy in everything*. NCV™

2Tim 2:2 [Paul, to Timothy:] Take the teachings that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and *entrust them to reliable people*, who will be able to teach others also. GNT

Stand by others . . .

Luke 22:28 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *You are the ones who have always stood by me in my trials.* ISV

Ruth 1:15–17 So Naomi said, "Look, your sister–in–law is returning to her people and to her god. Follow your sister–in–law back home!" [16]*But Ruth replied, "Stop urging me to abandon you! For wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will become my people, and your God will become my God.* [17]*Wherever you die, I will die – and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I do not keep my promise! Only death will be able to separate me from you!"* NET

Ruth's promise to stand by her bereaved mother-in-law is a superlative expression of loyalty and commitment.

. . . Do not desert others

Josh 22:3 [Joshua, to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh:] *All this time, to this day, you have never deserted your relatives.* You have carefully kept the commands of the Lord your God. GW

Prov 27:10a *Never abandon your friend nor your father's friend …* ISV

Do not betray others

Matt 27:4a [Judas:] *"I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death!"* GNT

Job 17:5 *If a man denounces his friends for personal gain, the eyes of his children will fail.* NET

If one betrays his friend for reward, such will be the consequences that even his children will "suffer for it" (GNT).

Consequences of unfaithfulness

Prov 11:3, 6 The integrity of the upright guides them, but *the crookedness of the unfaithful destroys them*. … [6]The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but *the faithless will be captured by their own desires*. NET

b) Truthfulness

Be truthful . . .

Ps 51:6a [David, to God:] Yet, *you desire truth* and sincerity. GW

Zec 8:19b *You must love truth* and peace. GNT

. . . Speak the truth

Zec 8:16a *These are the things you must do: Speak the truth, each of you, to one another.* NET

Be honest

Eph 4:28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. *Be honest* and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need. CEV

Luke 8:15 Those seeds that fell on good ground are the people who listen to the message and *keep it in good and honest hearts*. They last and produce a harvest. CEV

Be sincere

2Cor 1:12b [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] Our conscience testifies that *we have conducted ourselves in the world with pure motives and godly sincerity,* without earthly wisdom but with God's grace—and especially towards you. ISV

Have integrity . . .

1Ki 9:4a [GOD, TO SOLOMON:] *You must serve me with integrity and sincerity, just as your father David did.* NET

. . . Integrity brings security

Prov 10:9 *The one who conducts himself in integrity will live securely,* but the one who behaves perversely will be found out. NET

c) Deceitfulness

Do not deceive

Lev 19:11b *Never steal, lie, or deceive your neighbor.* GW

Do not lie

Col 3:9–10 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] *Do not lie to one another* since you have put off the old man with its practices [10]and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it. NET

Do not give false testimony

Ex 20:16 *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.* NET

Do not use flattery

Ps 12:2–3 [DAVID:] People lie to one another; *they flatter and deceive.* [3]*May the LORD cut off all flattering lips*, and the tongue that boasts! NET

Do not plot evil schemes

Zec 8:17a *Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another.* NET

Prov 12:20 *Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil*, but those who promote peace have joy. NET

Avoid hypocrisy: Not acting in accordance with what you say; . . .

Matt 23:2–3 [JESUS:] The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. [3]Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But *do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach*. NET

. . . and false external practices – doing things for show

Mark 12:40 [JESUS, REFERRING TO THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW:] *They devour widows' property, and as a show make long prayers. These men will receive a more severe punishment.* NET

Deceptive practices bring oneself harm

Prov 17:20 The one who has a perverse heart does not find good, and *the one who is deceitful in speech falls into trouble*. NET

Prov 21:28 *A lying witness will perish*, but the one who reports accurately speaks forever. NET

Deceptive practices ultimately bring God's judgment

Ps 52:3–5 [DAVID, AS IF SPEAKING TO A WICKED MAN:] *You love evil more than good, lies more than speaking the truth.* (Selah) [4]*You love to use all the words that destroy, and the tongue that deceives.* [5]*Yet God will make you a permanent heap of ruins. He will scoop you up and remove*

you from your home; he will uproot you from the land of the living. (Selah) NET

Rev 21:8 But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and *all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death.* NET

d) Dishonest Gain

Note that because much of what can be described as "dishonest gain" involves deceitfulness, a good portion of this section is also relevant to the previous section, *Deceitfulness*.

Do not pursue dishonest gain

1Tim 3:8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, *not greedy for dishonest gain*. ESV

Do not steal

Ex 20:15 *You shall not steal.* NET

Do not defraud

Lev 19:13a *You shall not cheat your neighbor ...* NKJV

Do not take excessive interest or extort money

Ezek 18:17–18 [EZEKIEL, SPEAKING OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON:] He keeps his hand from doing wrong. *He does not take too much interest or profit when he lends money.* He obeys my laws and lives by my rules. He will not die for his father's sin; *he will surely live*. [18]But *his father took other people's money unfairly* and robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. *So he will die for his own sin.* NCV™

Do not accept bribes

Ex 23:8 *Never take a bribe, because bribes blind those who can see and deny justice to those who are in the right.* GW

Ill-gotten gain does not last

Prov 13:11a *Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished ...* NKJV

Ill-gotten gain has ill consequences

Prov 1:19 *Such is the way of all those who seek illicit gain—it takes away the lives of those who possess it.* ISV

1Cor 6:10 ... *thieves*, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, *and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God*. NET

e) Addendum: Oaths

The swearing of an oath has two main usages: to affirm the truthfulness of a statement; and to confirm the sincerity and binding nature of a pledge or agreement. The OT law stipulated that it was to be done in God's name – as opposed to that of a false god – appealing to or invoking God as a witness to the integrity of what was said. It cannot be done falsely – or lightly (cf. Lev 5:4) – and cannot be broken (cf. Num 30:2; Josh 9:3–21).

The practice of swearing oaths, in God's name – not to be done falsely

Deut 6:13 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] You must revere the LORD your God, serve him, and *take oaths using only his name*. NET

Lev 19:12 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must not swear falsely in my name, so that you do not profane the name of your God.* I am the LORD. NET

Swearing an oath to assert the truthfulness of a statement

2Cor 1:18 [PAUL:] But *as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No."* NET

By linking the truth of his words with the certainty of God being faithful, Paul to all intents and purposes swears an oath based on God's faithfulness if not his name.

Swearing an oath to confirm a pledge . . .

Num 30:2 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath of binding obligation on himself, he must not break his word, but must do whatever he has promised.* NET

. . . Such oaths are barred by NT teaching

Matt 5:33–37 [Jesus:] Again, *you have heard that it was said to an older generation, 'Do not break an oath, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.' [34]But I say to you, do not take oaths at all – not by heaven, because it is the throne of God, [35]not by earth, because it is his footstool, and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. [36]Do not take an oath by your head, because you are not able to make one hair white or black. [37]Let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no.' More than this is from the evil one.* NET

> Possibly in response to abuse of such oaths associated with pledges, Jesus taught that we should not swear them at all (v. 34a), but instead simply state our intention (v. 37).

CHAPTER 33

Wisdom

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I. Being Wise

Wisdom is one of the attributes most highly valued in the Bible. Thankfully the Bible says much about how we can gain wisdom. The Bible also contains very astute advice on other topics associated with wisdom, notably speaking – a key medium that we use in relating to others.

a) Prologue: The Precedence of Godly Wisdom

Note that the term "godly wisdom" is used in this section to denote the wisdom which the Bible advocates, wisdom which is based on the Bible's teachings.

Godly wisdom is superior to anything else

Prov 4:7a *Wisdom is supreme …* NET

Prov 8:10–11 [WISDOM:] *Grab hold of my instruction in lieu of money and knowledge instead of the finest gold,* [11]*because wisdom is better than precious gems and nothing you desire can compare to it.* ISV

The speaker here is wisdom personified.

Worldly wisdom is flawed and inferior to the wisdom of God . . .

1Cor 3:18–19 No one should fool himself. *If anyone among you thinks that he is wise by this world's standards, he should become a fool, in order to be really wise.* [19]*For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God's sight. As the scripture says, "God traps the wise in their cleverness"; …* GNT

Here Paul portrays worldly wisdom as inferior to the wisdom of God – to both the wisdom of God himself (v. 19) and to godly wisdom (v. 18), which ultimately comes from God. Note that in saying that one should become a "fool" (v. 18), Paul means that one needs to forgo aspiring to the flawed wisdom of this world and recognize the shortcomings of one's understanding – in effect see oneself as a "fool" – in order to be open to true, godly wisdom.

. . . Worldly wisdom is ultimately futile, even detrimental

1Cor 3:20b *"The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."* NET

Rom 1:21–23 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF WICKED PEOPLE:] For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but *they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened.* [22]*Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools* [23]*and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.* NET

The claim to be wise (v. 22) may have had some substance, but clearly this was a wisdom apart from God (vv. 21, 23) – worldly wisdom. As such it produced futile thinking and foolishness (v. 21b), manifested in foolish actions that would prove very detrimental (v. 23; cf. vv. 24–32).

So get godly wisdom and be wise . . .

Prov 4:5, 7 [A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] *Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding*; do not forget and do not turn aside from the words I speak. … [7]*Wisdom is supreme – so acquire wisdom, and whatever you acquire, acquire understanding!* NET

Eph 5:15 Therefore be very careful how you *live – not as unwise but as wise, …* NET

. . . Seek out wisdom and knowledge

Prov 2:3–5 … yes, *if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,* [4]*if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,* [5]*then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.* ESV

Prov 15:14 *The discerning heart seeks knowledge*, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly. NET

b) Wisdom through God

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom

Prov 9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. ESV

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom as it leads us to base our thinking and life on God and his teachings or commands – the source of true wisdom for life. For fear of God moves us to obey God's commands and do what is right, thus manifesting wisdom (as indicated in the following two subsections).

Ask God for wisdom . . .

James 1:5 But *if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him*. NET

Ps 119:34, 66a [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Give me understanding* so that I might observe your law, and keep it with all my heart. ... [66]*Teach me proper discernment and understanding!* NET

. . . For it is God who gives wisdom

Dan 2:20b–21 [DANIEL:] May the name of God be blessed forever and ever; *wisdom and power are his for evermore*. [21]It is God who alters the times and seasons, and he removes kings and promotes kings. *He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.* ISV

Obeying God's commands brings wisdom

Deut 4:5–6 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Look! I have taught you statutes and ordinances just as the LORD my God told me to do, so that you might carry them out in the land you are about to enter and possess. [6]So *be sure to do them, because this will testify of your wise understanding to the people who will learn of all these statutes and say, "Indeed, this great nation is a very wise people."* NET

Ps 119:100 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I have greater wisdom than those who are old, because I obey your commands.* GNT

Note: Wisdom involves doing what is right – and shunning evil

Prov 4:11 [A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] *I will guide you in the way of wisdom and I will lead you in upright paths.* NET

Prov 14:16 *A wise person is cautious and turns from evil*, but a fool throws off restraint and is overconfident. NET

c) Wisdom through Others

Note that, largely at least, the verses in this section speak of wisdom being acquired through godly people. Such wisdom is ultimately from God.

Pay attention to instruction . . .

Prov 23:12, 19 *Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge. ...* [19]*Listen, my child, and be wise*, and guide your heart on the right way. NET

. . . For wise people heed and learn from instruction

Prov 13:1 *A wise son heeds his father's instruction ...* NKJV

Prov 9:9 *Give instruction to a wise person, and he will become wiser still; teach a righteous person and he will add to his learning.* NET

Listen to advice

Prov 19:20 *Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise.* NCV™

Accept rebuke . . .

Prov 15:31 *Whoever listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.* ISV

. . . Additional insights on accepting rebuke

Eccl 7:5 *It is better to listen to a wise person's rebuke than to listen to the praise of fools.* ISV

Prov 27:6 *Faithful are the wounds of a friend*, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive. NET

Emotional wounds resulting from a friend's rebuke can be trusted to have been inflicted with one's benefit in view.

Heed discipline and correction

Prov 15:5, 32 *A fool rejects his father's discipline, but whoever heeds reproof shows good sense. ...* [32]*The one who refuses correction despises himself, but whoever hears reproof acquires understanding.* NET

Here "reproof" appears to refer to a rebuke or reprimand, a form of discipline (v. 5) or correction (v. 32).

Further insights on gaining wisdom

Prov 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but *with humility comes wisdom*. NET

Prov 14:29 *Patient people have great understanding,* but people with quick tempers show their foolishness. NCV™

Prov 27:17 *As iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens his friend.* NET

> As one piece of iron can be used to sharpen another, so through discussion and debate with another, one can sharpen one's mind.

d) Wise Speech (I): Instructions

Be quick to listen and slow to speak

James 1:19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! *Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak,* slow to anger. NET

Be careful when speaking

Prov 13:3 *Those who are careful about what they say protect their lives, but whoever speaks without thinking will be ruined.* NCV™

Use few words

Prov 10:19 *When words abound, transgression is inevitable, but the one who restrains his words is wise.* NET

Eccl 6:11 *The more words there are, the more pointless they become. What advantage do mortals gain from this?* GW

Speak gently

Prov 15:1 *A gentle answer quietens anger,* but a harsh one stirs it up. GNT

2Tim 2:25 *The Lord's servant must gently teach those who disagree.* Then maybe God will let them change their minds so they can accept the truth. NCV™

Speak graciously

Eccl 10:12 *The words spoken by the wise are gracious,* but the lips of a fool will devour him. ISV

Col 4:6 *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone.* NET

Do not sin in what you say

Ps 17:3b [DAVID:] *I am determined I will say nothing sinful.* NET

Note: Instructions and insights on giving rebuke

Luke 17:3 Watch yourselves! *If your brother sins, rebuke him.* If he repents, forgive him. NET

2Tim 3:16 *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error,* correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, … GNT

Prov 27:5 *Better is open rebuke than hidden love.* NET

> Open rebuke is better than love that is shut off. The implication here may well be that one who truly loves another will openly rebuke them (cf. CEV) if the need arises.

e) Wise Speech (II): Insights

The righteous speak wisely . . .

Prov 10:31–32 *The words of the righteous overflow with wisdom,* but the perverse tongue will be cut out. [32]*Righteous lips know what is prudent,* but the words of the wicked are perverse. ISV

. . . One's words are determined by the "heart"

Matt 12:34–35 [JESUS, TO THE PHARISEES:] Offspring of vipers! *How are you able to say anything good, since you are evil? For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart.* [35]*The good person brings good things out of his good treasury, and the evil person brings evil things out of his evil treasury.* NET

> In v. 35, "treasury" refers to the thoughts and feelings that people have stored up in their hearts. Words that are wise and good come from a "heart" that is good/righteous and wise. Conversely, foolish

and evil words come from a "heart" that has such characteristics.

Wise speech is of great value

Prov 25:11 *Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is a word skillfully spoken.* NET

The speech of the wise imparts wisdom and knowledge

Ps 49:3 [A WISE PERSON:] *My mouth shall speak wisdom, And the meditation of my heart shall give understanding.* NKJV

Prov 15:7 *The lips of the wise spread knowledge,* but not so the heart of fools. NET

Further ways wise speech benefits others

Prov 12:18 Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword, but *the words of the wise bring healing.* NET

Prov 13:14 *Instruction from the wise is like a life-giving fountain, to turn a person from deadly snares.* NET

Beware: The tongue has great power, capable of evil and destructive effects

James 3:4–8 And look at ships! They are so big that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are steered wherever the pilot pleases by a tiny rudder. [5]*In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast of great achievements. A huge forest can be set on fire by a little flame.* [6]*The tongue is a fire, a world of evil. Placed among the parts of our bodies, the tongue contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell.* [7]For all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be or have been tamed by the human species, [8]but *no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil filled with deadly poison.* ISV

The tongue has great influence over the whole body, capable of devastating effects on one's life and on others. In saying that the tongue is "set on fire by hell" (v. 6), James appears to allude to its evil disposition having Satanic origins – which ultimately is true of all evil. Note that with the use of "tongue", James is speaking ultimately of the heart which manifests itself in the words of the tongue.

f) Wise Personal Practices

The following topics are prominent in what are known as the Bible's wisdom books, notably in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes – as well as occurring elsewhere in the Bible.

Be self-controlled . . .

Titus 2:6 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TITUS WHAT TO TEACH:] Tell the young men to *have self-control in everything.* CEV

. . . Self-control comes from God and wisdom

2Tim 1:7 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] For *God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.* NET

Gal 5:22–23 But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23]*gentleness, and self-control.* Against such things there is no law. NET

Prov 29:11 *Foolish people lose their tempers, but wise people control theirs.* NCV™

Do not act in haste

Prov 19:2 It is dangerous to have zeal without knowledge, and *the one who acts hastily makes poor choices.* NET

Work hard . . .

2Thes 3:7b–9 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] *We didn't waste our time loafing,* [8]*and we didn't accept food from anyone without paying for it. We didn't want to be a burden to any of you, so night and day we worked as hard as we could.* [9]*We had the right not to work, but we wanted to set an example for you.* CEV

Prov 31:13–19 *She* [a wife of noble character] *obtains wool and flax, and she is pleased to work with her hands.* [14]*She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar.* [15]*She also gets up while it is still night, and provides food for her household and a portion to her female servants.* [16]*She considers a field and buys it; from her own income she plants a vineyard.* [17]*She begins her work vigorously, and she strengthens her arms.* [18]*She knows that her merchandise is good, and*

her lamp does not go out in the night. [19]*Her hands take hold of the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle.* NET

. . . Ensure you have adequate provisions

Prov 6:6–8 *Go to the ant, you sluggard; observe its ways and be wise!* [7]*It has no commander, overseer, or ruler,* [8]*yet it prepares its food in the summer; it gathers at the harvest what it will eat.* NET

The ant is a great example of producing adequate provisions.

Enjoy life and be happy

Eccl 8:15 [A WISE TEACHER:] So *I recommend the enjoyment of life, for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. So joy will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.* NET

Eccl 3:12 [A WISE TEACHER:] *I have concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, …* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge

Foolishness and spiritual ignorance are the antitheses of godly wisdom and knowledge. Moreover, foolishness and spiritual ignorance are very closely related to ungodliness; for ungodliness is the prime cause of them and further ungodliness results from them. Foolishness and spiritual ignorance with their consequences, stand in stark contrast to wisdom and her blessings.

a) Foolishness

Fools spurn and lack wisdom

Prov 1:7 Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but *fools despise wisdom and instruction*. NET

Prov 24:7 *Wisdom is unattainable for a fool*; in court he does not open his mouth. NET

Foolishness is characterized by failure to comprehend God and his ways

Ps 14:1a *Fools say to themselves, "There is no God."* NET

Jer 5:4 [JEREMIAH:] I thought, "Surely it is only the ignorant poor who act this way. *They act like fools because they do not know what the LORD demands. They do not know what their God requires of them.* NET

Foolishness is characterized by failure to comprehend other spiritual truths

Luke 24:25 Then Jesus said to them, "*How foolish you are! You're so slow to believe everything the prophets said!* GW

James 2:20 *You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing?* NCV™

Foolishness involves acting contrary to God

1Sam 13:13 Then Samuel said to Saul, "*You have acted foolishly. You haven't obeyed the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you.* For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, ... ISV

Ps 74:22 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Rise up, O God! Defend your honor! Remember how *fools insult you all day long!* NET

Foolishness encompasses sin

Num 12:11 So Aaron said to Moses, "O my lord, please do not hold this sin against us, in which *we have acted foolishly and have sinned!* NET

Foolishness encompasses doing wrong

Prov 10:23 *A foolish person enjoys doing wrong*, but a person with understanding enjoys doing what is wise. NCV™

Results of foolishness . . .

Prov 3:35 The wise inherit honor, but *he* [God] *holds fools up to public contempt*. NET

Prov 18:6 *The lips of a fool enter into strife, and his mouth invites a flogging.* NET

. . . Ultimately, foolishness results in ruin – even death

Prov 19:3 *People's own foolishness ruins their lives*, but in their minds they blame the LORD. NCV™

Eccl 7:17 Do not excel at wickedness, *nor be a fool. Why die before your time?* ISV

b) Foolish and Ungodly Practices

Being quick-tempered is foolish and ungodly

Prov 14:17 *A person who has a quick temper does foolish things*, and a person with crafty schemes is hated. NET

Prov 29:22 *A person with a quick temper stirs up arguments and commits a lot of sins.* CEV

Indulging in pleasure is foolish and pointless . . .

Eccl 2:1–2 [A WISE TEACHER:] Come now, *I will try self-indulgent pleasure to see if it is worthwhile." But I found that it also is futile.* [2]*I said of partying, "It is folly," and of self-indulgent pleasure, "It accomplishes nothing!"* NET

> In v. 1 the writer's thought is addressed to himself. He has in view trying out pleasure or having fun (cf. CEV, NCV).

. . . and indulging in pleasure is ungodly

Luke 8:14 [JESUS, EXPLAINING A PARABLE:] The seed that fell among the thorny weeds is like those who hear God's teaching, but they let the worries, riches, and *pleasures of this life keep them from growing and producing good fruit.* NCV™

> Pleasure can choke our responsiveness to God's word (the "seed") as pleasure can involve practices that either: are opposed to God's word; or crowd out God's word, leaving little or no room for it in our lives.

Drunkenness and gluttony are unwise, causing one trouble . . .

Prov 23:19–21 [A WISE TEACHER:] *Listen, my child, and be wise*, and guide your heart on the right way. [20]*Do not spend time among drunkards, among those who eat too much meat,* [21]*because drunkards and gluttons become impoverished, and drowsiness clothes them with rags.* NET

. . . Drunkenness should be avoided, particularly as it leads to ungodliness

Prov 31:4–5 It is not for kings, O [King] Lemuel, *it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to crave strong drink,* [5]*lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and remove from all the poor their legal rights.* NET

Eph 5:18 *Stop getting drunk with wine, which leads to wild living*, but keep on being filled with the Spirit. ISV

Further ungodly practices that are notably foolish

Prov 6:32 *He who commits adultery lacks sense*; he who does it destroys himself. ESV

Prov 10:18 The one who conceals hatred utters lies, and *the one who spreads slander is certainly a fool.* NET

Prov 28:26 *Those who trust in themselves are foolish,* but those who live wisely will be kept safe. NCV™

c) Spiritual Ignorance (I): Causes and Results

Spiritual ignorance is caused basically by sin and ungodliness

John 3:19b–20 [JESUS:] The light has come into the world, but *people loved the darkness more than the light because their actions were evil.* [20]*Everyone who practices wickedness hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his actions may not be exposed.* ISV

> Due to people's evil deeds, they spurn the spiritual light that is Jesus Christ and his truth. For this light exposes their deeds for what they really are – evil. Spurning Christ's light means spiritual ignorance.

Spiritual ignorance is caused partly by the ungodly being closed-minded . . .

Eph 4:18 They [godless people] are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of *the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts.* NET

> This hardness of heart indicates that such people have "shut their minds" (NLT) – being stubborn (cf. CEV, GNT) and refusing to listen (NCV).

. . . God may even judicially blind ungodly people

Isa 6:9–10 [GOD, TO ISAIAH:] And he said, "Go and *tell these people, 'No matter how closely you listen, you'll never understand. No matter how closely you look, you'll never see.'* [10]*Make these people close-minded. Plug their ears. Shut their eyes.* Otherwise, they may see with their eyes,

hear with their ears, understand with their minds, and return and be healed." GW

Isaiah was to pronounce God's judicial blinding and hardening of the people (vv. 9–10a), making certain the judgment God had ordained (cf. vv. 11–12). For such had been the people's rebellion, that God chose to ensure that the people would not seek to avoid the judgment (v. 10b).

Thus, the ungodly lack spiritual wisdom . . .

Deut 32:20b, 28 [God, speaking of the unfaithful Israelites:] I will reject them, I will see what will happen to them; for *they are a perverse generation, children who show no loyalty. …* [28]*They are a nation devoid of wisdom, and there is no understanding among them.* NET

. . . and the ungodly are in spiritual "darkness"

Prov 4:19 *The way of the wicked is like gloomy darkness; they do not know what causes them to stumble.* NET

Spiritual ignorance results in further sin

1Pet 1:14 [Peter, to believers:] Like obedient children, do not comply with *the evil urges you used to follow in your ignorance, …* NET

This speaks of sin or evil actions as being a product of ignorance. While sin is the prime cause of spiritual ignorance (as discussed earlier), spiritual ignorance in turn leads to further sin, exacerbating the ungodliness of such people.

Spiritual ignorance and lack of spiritual perception result in unbelief

John 12:37–40 *Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them* [Jews]*, they still refused to believe in him,* [38]*so that the word of Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled. He said, "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"* [39]*For this reason they could not believe, because again Isaiah said,* [40]*"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me,* and I would heal them." NET

Verses 39–40 speak of God's judicial blinding of many of the Jews and their subsequent lack of spiritual perception as causing their unbelief (vv. 37–38).

Spiritual ignorance and lack of spiritual understanding culminate in dire consequences

Hos 4:6a, 14b [God:] *My people will be destroyed, because they have no knowledge. …* [14]*…A foolish people will be ruined.* NCV™

d) Spiritual Ignorance (II): Knowledge Lacked

The assertions contained in the subheadings in this section are typically true of ungodly people. Having said this, not all ungodly people and unbelievers are totally ignorant of all the things mentioned here.

The ungodly do not know God or Jesus Christ

John 8:19 Then they [the Pharisees] began asking him, "Who is your father?" *Jesus answered, "You do not know either me or my Father. If you knew me you would know my Father too."* NET

The ungodly do not comprehend God's word

John 5:39–40 [Jesus, to the Jewish religious leaders:] *You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me,* [40]*but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.* NET

Although they diligently studied the Scriptures, the Jewish leaders – who had in fact become in many ways ungodly – did not comprehend that the Scriptures spoke about Jesus, the way to life.

The ungodly do not know how God wants them to live . . .

Ps 95:10 [God, speaking of the Israelites:] For forty years I loathed that generation and said, *"They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways."* ESV

. . . and they do not know or understand many other spiritual truths

Rom 10:3 [Paul, speaking of the Jews in general:] *They have not known the way in which God puts people right with himself*, and instead, they have tried to set up their own way; and so they did not submit themselves to God's way of putting people right. GNT

1Cor 2:14 *A person who does not have the Spirit does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God. That person thinks they are foolish and cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit.* NCV™

The ungodly are ignorant of and deceived about their sin

Ps 36:1–2 An evil man is rebellious to the core. He does not fear God, [2]for *he is too proud to recognize and give up his sin*. NET

Prov 30:20 *This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have not done wrong."* NET

The ungodly are misguided about their standing with God and Jesus Christ

Matt 7:21–23 [Jesus:] *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.* [22]*On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?'* [23]*Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!'* NET

The ungodly are skeptical of God knowing their deeds and of his judgment

Ps 10:11, 13b *The wicked think, "God has forgotten us. He doesn't see what is happening." ...* [13]*... They say to themselves, "God won't punish us."* NCV™

The ungodly are largely oblivious of God's pending punishment – which they will bear

Zeph 1:12 [God:] At that time *I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.'* GW

e) Epilogue: Blessings of Wisdom

Understanding . . .

Dan 12:10b None of the wicked will understand, though *the wise will understand*. NET

> Understanding and discernment (below) are key components of wisdom. As such, having wisdom means that one possesses these characteristics, which are great blessings.

. . . and discernment

Prov 16:21 *The one who is wise in heart is called discerning*, and kind speech increases persuasiveness. NET

Knowledge

Prov 8:12 [Wisdom personified:] *I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I find knowledge* and discretion. NET

Righteousness and justice

Prov 2:9–10, 20 *Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity – every good way.* [10]*For wisdom will enter your heart, and moral knowledge will be attractive to you. ...* [20]*So you will walk in the way of good people, and will keep on the paths of the righteous.* NET

Protection . . .

Prov 4:6 *Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will guard you.* NET

. . . and life

Prov 8:35 [Wisdom personified:] For *the one who finds me finds life* and receives favor from the Lord. NET

Strength

Eccl 7:19 *Wisdom makes a person stronger than ten leaders in a city.* NCV™

Prosperity

Prov 21:20 *Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling,* but a foolish man devours it. ESV

Honor

Prov 4:8–9 [A WISE TEACHER, SPEAKING OF WISDOM:] *Esteem her highly and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.* [9]*She will place a fair garland on your head; she will bestow a beautiful crown on you.* NET

Note: Living without wisdom has harmful consequences

Prov 1:24–27 [WISDOM PERSONIFIED, TO THOSE WHO DISREGARD HER:] However, *because I called but you refused to listen, because I stretched out my hand but no one paid attention,* [25]*because you neglected all my advice, and did not comply with my rebuke,* [26]*so I myself will laugh when disaster strikes you, I will mock when what you dread comes,* [27]*when what you dread comes like a whirlwind, and disaster strikes you like a devastating storm, when distressing trouble comes on you.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 34

Common Relationships

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I. Family Relationships

The Bible contains discerning insights and directions regarding relationships with those who are closest to us. As such these teachings are among the ones which are the most often applicable to our lives.

a) Prologue: Getting Married

Issues in deciding whether to stay single or to marry: General; . . .

1Cor 7:1–2 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] Now, to deal with the matters you wrote about. *A man does well not to marry.* [2]*But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband.* GNT

In v. 1, Paul may have in mind staying single so as to be devoted to God's kingdom (cf. vv. 7; 32–35 ⇩) and/or for one's own sake (cf. vv. 26–28, 40). Alternatively, he may simply be quoting a statement the Corinthians had written. In v. 2 Paul apparently is referring to extensive sexual immorality that was prevalent in Corinth at the time. He raises the immorality as a reason to have one's own spouse, to satisfy one's sexual desires (cf. vv. 3–5) and so to help avoid the immorality.

. . . Forsaking marriage for Jesus Christ

1Cor 7:32–35 [Paul, to believers:] *I would like you to be free from worry. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work, because he is trying to please the Lord.* [33]*But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife;* [34]*and so he is pulled in two directions. An unmarried woman or a virgin concerns herself with the Lord's work, because she wants to be dedicated both in body and spirit; but a married woman concerns herself with worldly matters, because she wants to please her husband.* [35]I am saying this because I want to help you. *I am not trying to put restrictions on you. Instead, I want you to do what is right and proper, and to give yourselves completely to the Lord's service without any reservation.* GNT

Paul effectively is urging those who are single to remain as such, so as to be completely devoted to the Lord.

Do not marry outside of God's people – particularly as it can result in being led astray

2Cor 6:14–15 [Paul, to believers:] *Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness?* [15]*And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever?* NET

Deut 7:3–4 [Moses, warning the Israelites about intermarriage with pagan nations:] *You must not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons,* [4]*for they will turn your sons away from me to worship other gods.* Then the anger of the Lord will erupt against you and he will quickly destroy you. NET

Such warnings to Israel are at least to some extent applicable to believers marrying outside of God's people, i.e. marrying a non-believer. For in doing so one runs the risk of compromising one's devotion to God.

A person should have only one spouse

Titus 1:6 An elder must *be blameless, the husband of one wife*, with faithful children who cannot be charged with dissipation or rebellion. NET

Remarriage and adultery

Matt 19:9 [Jesus:] And I say to you: *whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.* ESV

Matt 5:32 [Jesus:] But I say to you that *everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.* ESV

The assertion that a man who divorces his wife actually "makes her commit adultery", may have in view the need and inevitability of remarriage for a woman in ancient times in order to have a means of provision.

b) Spouses (I): General

A husband and wife should be as one, which involves sexual union

Gen 2:22–24 The LORD God used the rib from the man [Adam] to make a woman [Eve], and then he brought the woman to the man. [23]And the man said, "Now, *this is someone whose bones came from my bones, whose body came from my body. I will call her 'woman,' because she was taken out of man."* [24]*So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.* NCV™

> Just as originally the man and the woman were of the one body (vv. 22–23), so a husband and wife will be united as "one body" (v. 24). The term "one body" appears to encompass a oneness in spirit, and is signified and expressed through sexual bonding. The use of the term also implies a lifelong, monogamous relationship.

Husbands should love their wives

Eph 5:25, 33 *Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her* … [33]Nevertheless, *each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself*, and the wife must respect her husband. NET

> The directive for husbands to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her" (v. 25) is both daunting and inspirational. It calls for a love that is ever persistent and is all surpassing, even to the point of sacrificing one's life.

Wives should submit to their husbands

Eph 5:22–24 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* [23]*For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* [24]*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* ESV

> Such submission should be voluntary and willing. The corresponding authority of the husband is not about control and should only be practiced in a Christ-like manner and in love, which should characterize all he does in relating to his wife.

Do not commit adultery – which brings God's judgment

Ex 20:14 *You shall not commit adultery.* NET

Heb 13:4 *Let marriage be kept honorable in every way, and the marriage bed undefiled. For God will judge those who commit sexual sins, especially those who commit adultery.* ISV

Avoid divorce – it is contrary to God's purposes

Matt 19:3–8 Then some Pharisees came to him [Jesus] in order to test him. *They asked, "Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?"* [4]*He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female,* [5]*and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?* [6]*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* [7]They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?" [8]*Jesus said to them, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hard hearts, but from the beginning it was not this way.* NET

> The implication of the two OT quotations (vv. 4–5), as made clear in v. 6, is that God has purposed that husband and wife be one – which divorce is contrary to. Moses permitted divorce because of people's "hard-hearted wickedness" (NLT), with their innate unwillingness or incapacity to embrace his teaching (cf. GNT, NCV). But the permitting of divorce was not part of God's original purpose (v. 8; cf. CEV, NLT), and as such falls well short of what is ideal.

c) Spouses (II): Romantic Love

> Note that most of the verses in this section are from the book "Song of Songs" (or "Song of Solomon"). Bear in mind that it is largely composed of speech by a man and a woman, possibly from both their courtship and marriage.

The marvel of love

Prov 30:18–19 [AGUR:] *There are three things that are too hard for me, really four I don't understand*: [19]the way an eagle flies in the sky, the way a snake slides over a rock, the way a ship sails on the sea, and *the way a man and a woman fall in love*. NCV™

Song 8:6b–7 For *love is as strong as death, passion is as unrelenting as Sheol. Its flames burst forth, it is a blazing flame.* [7]*Surging waters cannot quench love; floodwaters cannot overflow it. If someone were to offer all his possessions to buy love, the offer would be utterly despised.* NET

The Hebrew translated here as "a blazing flame" (v. 6b) has been interpreted by some to allude to God as being the source of love (cf. AMP, ESV, ISV, NASB). Verse 7b indicates that love cannot be bought. It points to love's incalculable worth and shows that it is beyond the realm of riches.

Spouses and their love belong exclusively to each other

Song 2:16 [The woman:] *My lover is mine and I am his*; he grazes among the lilies. NET

Prov 5:15–19 *Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well.* [16]*Should your springs flow outside, or streams of water in the street?* [17]*They should be for you alone and not for strangers with you.* [18]*Let your fountain be blessed and enjoy the wife of your youth.* [19]*Like a loving deer and a beautiful doe, let her breasts satisfy you all the time. Be constantly intoxicated by her love.* ISV

There are different interpretations of the imagery in verses 16–17, but it is clear that their basic thrust is that one should enjoy sexual relationships exclusively with one's spouse. This also appears to be the main thought behind the rest of the passage.

Further insights on love

Song 2:7 [The woman:] I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the young does of the open fields: *Do not awaken or arouse love until it pleases!* NET

One should not try to stimulate or forcibly ignite love; such love is at best superficial and not true love. Love is spontaneous and instinctive; it comes when "it pleases" – when "it is ready" (CEV, NCV, NRSV).

Song 5:16b [The woman:] Yes, daughters of Jerusalem, *this is my lover and my friend*. NCV™

This reflects the fact that friendship is an important aspect of romantic love.

Examples and declarations of love

Gen 29:20 So *Jacob worked for Laban seven years so he could marry Rachel. But they seemed like just a few days to him because he loved Rachel very much.* NCV™

Song 2:5 [The woman:] *Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.* NET

Song 4:9 [The man:] *You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride! You have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.* NET

Desire for and enjoyment of sexual intimacy with one's lover

Song 4:6 [The man:] *Until the dawn arrives and the shadows flee, I will go up to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.* NET

Song 5:1a [The man:] *I have entered my garden, O my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my balsam spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk!* NET

As illustrated in the above verses, Song of Songs contains beautiful but also sensual poetry, but is never crude. The sensual parts are often comprised of imagery, notably imagery involving sensuous aspects of nature. This is exemplified in the above verses by the use of metaphors for the woman/wife with her pleasures.

d) Parents' Duties to Children (I): Love and Care

Parents should love their children

Titus 2:4 [Paul, speaking of women in the church:] In this way they [older women] will train the younger women to love their husbands, *to love their children*, ... NET

Prov 13:24 The one who spares his rod hates his child, but *the one who loves his child* is diligent in disciplining him. NET

This implies that one ought to love one's child.

Parents should have compassion on their children

Ps 103:13 *As a father has compassion on his children*, so the LORD has compassion on his faithful followers. NET

Isa 49:15a Can a woman forget her baby who nurses at her breast? *Can she withhold compassion from the child she has borne?* NET

Parents should care for their children

1Thes 2:7 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] But we were gentle when we were with you, *like a mother taking care of her children*. GNT

Deut 1:31b [MOSES, SPEAKING TO THE ISRAELITES OF GOD'S CARE:] You saw how *he brought you safely all the way to this place, just as a father would carry his son*. GNT

Parents should provide for their children

Prov 31:15, 21 She [a wife of noble character] also gets up while it is still night, and *provides food for her household* and a portion to her female servants. ... [21]*She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all of her household are clothed with scarlet.* NET

> The reference to being "clothed with scarlet" (v. 21) appears to refer to quality, warm clothing (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NIrV, NLT).

Parents should pray for their children

1Chr 29:19 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Make my son Solomon willing to obey your commands, rules, and regulations, and to complete building the palace for which I have made preparations.* NET

Mark 5:22–23 Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came up, and *when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet.* [23]*He asked him urgently, "My little daughter is near death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may be healed and live."* NET

> The father's request of Jesus on behalf of his daughter is effectively an example of a parent's prayer for their child.

e) Parents' Duties to Children (II): Godly Training

Parents should raise their children to live as God wants

Eph 6:4 Fathers, do not make your children angry, but *raise them with the training and teaching of the Lord*. NCV™

Deut 32:46b [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Keep in mind all the words I am solemnly proclaiming to you today; *you must command your children to observe carefully all the words of this law*. NET

Parents should discipline their children

Prov 19:18 *Discipline your children while they are young enough to learn. If you don't, you are helping them to destroy themselves.* GNT

Heb 12:9a Besides this, *we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them*. ESV

Parents should teach their children about God and his deeds, inspiring them to obey God . . .

Ps 78:4b–7 *We will tell the next generation about the LORD's praiseworthy acts, about his strength and the amazing things he has done.* [5]*He established a rule in Jacob; he set up a law in Israel. He commanded our ancestors to make his deeds known to their descendants,* [6]*so that the next generation, children yet to be born, might know about them. They will grow up and tell their descendants about them.* [7]*Then they will place their confidence in God. They will not forget the works of God, and they will obey his commands.* NET

> This speaks of parents telling their children of God's deeds and power. Verse 7 then concludes that in light of God's wonderful deeds for them, the children would trust God and obey his commands.

. . . Parents should promote faith in their children

See also:

- Ps 78:7 ⇧

2Tim 3:14–15 [Paul, to Timothy:] You, however, must *continue in the things you have learned and are confident about. You know who taught you* [15]*and how from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* NET

> Particularly in the light of the reference to Timothy having known the Scriptures "from infancy" (v. 15), "who taught you" (v. 14) would be inclusive of – and probably primarily speaking of – Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (cf. 2Tim 1:5). By likewise teaching children the Scriptures, parents work towards giving them "wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15).

f) Children's Duties to Parents

Children are to honor and respect their parents

Eph 6:2–3 "*Honor your father and mother,*" which is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely, [3]"that it may go well with you and that you will live a long time on the earth." NET

Lev 19:3 [God:] *Each of you must respect his mother and his father,* and you must keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God. NET

Children are to obey their parents

Col 3:20 *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.* ESV

Children should heed their parents' teaching – which brings great benefits

Prov 6:20–23 [A wise father, to his son:] *My son, keep your father's commands, and don't forget your mother's teaching.* [21]*Keep their words in mind forever as though you had them tied around your neck.* [22]*They will guide you when you walk. They will guard you when you sleep. They will speak to you when you are awake.* [23]*These commands are like a lamp; this teaching is like a light. And the correction that comes from them will help you have life.* NCV™

> "They will guard you when you sleep" (v. 22) speaks of the security or protection that living by such teaching provides.

Children are to help their parents

1Tim 5:4 But *if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn to fulfill their duty toward their own household and so repay their parents what is owed them. For this is what pleases God.* NET

Note: One should assist any relative in need

1Tim 5:8 [Paul, to Timothy:] *If anyone does not take care of his own relatives, especially his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* ISV

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Civil Relationships

In addition to relationships with family members, the Bible looks at other relationships which have a marked effect on our lives. In doing so, it gives wise and challenging teaching regarding relationships between citizens and governing authorities, and between employees and employers.

a) Citizens' Duties to Authorities

Citizens should submit to and obey the governing authorities . . .

Titus 3:1 [Paul, instructing Titus what to teach believers:] Remind them *to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient*, to be ready for every good work. NET

As with the command "be subject to", the command to "be obedient" is also given in regard to "rulers and authorities".

. . . For the authorities have been established by God and they will punish wrongdoers

Rom 13:1–3 *Every person should obey the government in power. No government would exist if it hadn't been established by God. The governments which exist have been put in place by God.* 2*Therefore, whoever resists the government opposes what God has established. Those who resist will bring punishment on themselves.* 3*People who do what is right don't have to be afraid of the government. But people who do what is wrong should be afraid of it.* GW

Citizens should defy any command that conflicts with God's will

Dan 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said: 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! He sent his angel to deliver his servants who trusted in him. *They disobeyed the king's command and were willing to risk their lives in order not to serve or worship any god except their own God.* ISV

Acts 5:27–29 When they brought back the apostles, they made them stand in front of the council. The chief priest questioned them. 28*He said, "We gave you strict orders not to mention Jesus' name when you teach. Yet, you've filled Jerusalem with your teachings. You want to take revenge on us for putting that man to death."* 29*Peter and the other apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than people.* GW

Citizens should honor authorities

1Pet 2:17 *Show respect for all people*: Love the brothers and sisters of God's family, respect God, *honor the king*. NCV™

Citizens should pray for authorities

1Tim 2:1–2 [Paul:] First of all, then, *I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people,* 2*even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.* NET

b) Authorities' Duties to Citizens (I): General

Governing authorities should act and rule according to God's law and ways

Deut 17:18–20 [Moses, giving instructions for a king:] *When he sits on his royal throne he must make a copy of this law on a scroll given to him by the Levitical priests.* 19*It must be with him constantly and he must read it as long as he lives, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and observe all the words of this law and these statutes and carry them out.* 20*Then he will not exalt himself above his fellow citizens or turn from the commandments to the right or left*, and he and his descendants will enjoy many years ruling over his kingdom in Israel. NET

2Ki 18:3 And *he* [King Hezekiah] *did what was right in the eyes of the Lord*, according to all that David his father had done. ESV

Authorities should rule as servants of God and of their people

Rom 13:3b–4 [Paul:] Would you like to be unafraid of those in authority? Then do what is good, and they will praise you, [4]because *they are God's servants working for your own good*. But if you do evil, then be afraid of them, because their power to punish is real. *They are God's servants and carry out God's punishment on those who do evil.* GNT

1Ki 12:7 And they said to him [King Rehoboam], "If you will *be a servant to this people today and serve them*, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever." ESV

Authorities should rule wisely . . .

2Chr 11:23 And *he* [a king] *dealt wisely* and distributed some of his sons through all the districts of Judah and Benjamin, in all the fortified cities, and he gave them abundant provisions and procured wives for them. ESV

Jer 3:15 [God, to Israel:] I will give you leaders who will be faithful to me. *They will lead you with knowledge and insight.* NET

. . . Authorities need to be wise

Deut 1:13 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *Select wise and practical men*, those known among your tribes, *whom I may appoint as your leaders*. NET

Note: Further traits that should characterize authorities

Prov 20:28 *Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.* ESV

Josh 1:6, 9 [God, to Joshua:] *Be strong and brave! You must lead these people* in the conquest of this land that I solemnly promised their ancestors I would hand over to them. … [9]I repeat, *be strong and brave! Don't be afraid and don't panic*, for I, the Lord your God, am with you in all you do. NET

c) Authorities' Duties to Citizens (II): Justice

Authorities should rule justly

2Sam 8:15 *David reigned over all Israel; he guaranteed justice for all his people.* NET

2Chr 9:8b [The queen of Sheba to King Solomon:] Because of your God's love for Israel and his lasting commitment to them, *he made you king over them so you could make just and right decisions*. NET

Authorities should defend the needy

Ps 72:4 *He* [a Davidic king] *will defend the oppressed among the people; he will deliver the children of the poor and crush the oppressor.* NET

Prov 31:8–9 [Instructions to a king:] *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing.* [9]*Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy."* NCV™

Authorities should not rule unjustly . . .

Ezek 45:9 This is what the sovereign Lord says: *Enough, you princes of Israel! Put away violence and destruction, and do what is just and right. Put an end to your evictions of my people, declares the sovereign Lord.* NET

. . . Unjust rule brings God's judgment

Isa 10:1–3 [God:] *Those who enact unjust policies are as good as dead, those who are always instituting unfair regulations,* [2]*to keep the poor from getting fair treatment, and to deprive the oppressed among my people of justice, so they can steal what widows own, and loot what belongs to orphans.* [3]*What will you do on judgment day, when destruction arrives from a distant place? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your wealth?* NET

Various insights on unjust rule

Prov 17:7 *Excessive speech is not becoming for a fool; how much less are lies for a ruler!* NET

Prov 28:15–16a *Like a roaring lion or a roving bear, so is a wicked ruler over a poor people.* [16]*The prince who is a great oppressor lacks wisdom …* NET

Verse 15 illustrates the viciousness and destructiveness of a wicked ruler.

d) Servants and Masters

A number of verses in this section refer to slaves rather than servants. Generally the teaching regarding one of them is also very much applicable to the other.

Servants should obey and respect their masters

Col 3:22 *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in every respect, not only when they are watching* – like those who are strictly people–pleasers – *but with a sincere heart, fearing the Lord.* NET

1Pet 2:18 *Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.* ESV

Servants should be trustworthy and faithful

Titus 2:10 *They* [slaves] *should not steal from them but should show their masters they can be fully trusted* so that in everything they do they will make the teaching of God our Savior attractive. NCV™

Matt 25:20–21 And he [a servant] who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, *'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.'* [21]*His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful* over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ESV

Good service is rewarded

See also:

- Matt 25:21 ⇧

Prov 17:2 *A servant who acts wisely will rule over an heir who behaves shamefully, and will share the inheritance along with the relatives.* NET

Col 3:23–24 *Do your work willingly, as though you were serving the Lord himself, and not just your earthly master.* [24]*In fact, the Lord Christ is the one you are really serving, and you know that he will reward you.* CEV

Masters must treat servants justly

Col 4:1 *Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness*, because you know that you also have a master in heaven. NET

Lev 25:43 *Do not treat them harshly*, but obey your God. GNT

Masters should pay servants their wages

Lev 19:13b *You must not withhold the wages of the hired laborer* overnight until morning. NET

Mal 3:5 The LORD All-Powerful says, "Then *I will come to you and judge you. I will be quick to testify against* those who take part in evil magic, adultery, and lying under oath, *those who cheat workers of their pay* and who cheat widows and orphans, those who are unfair to foreigners, and those who do not respect me. NCV™

Note: Slavery is to be avoided and slave trading is evil

1Cor 7:23 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You were bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men.* NET

1Tim 1:9b–10 *It* [the law] *is for people who are against God and are sinful, who are not holy …* [10]*…who sell slaves*, who tell lies, who speak falsely, and who do anything against the true teaching of God. NCV™

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 35

Spreading the Gospel

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I. Instructions

The theme of spreading the gospel, or message about Jesus Christ, pervades the New Testament and should be also one of the main focuses of our lives. This section largely looks at what we need to say and do, in advancing the spread of the gospel.

a) Tell People the Gospel

Tell others the gospel message . . .

Acts 5:20 [An angel, to the apostles:] "Go and stand in the Temple, and *tell the people all about this new life*." GNT

Luke 3:18 In many different ways *John preached the good news to the people*. CEV

. . . Tell them the gospel about Jesus Christ

Acts 8:35 So Philip started speaking, and beginning with this scripture *proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him* [an Ethiopian official]. NET

1Thes 3:2b [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] Timothy, our brother, works with us for God and *helps us tell people the Good News about Christ*. We sent him to strengthen and encourage you in your faith … NCV™

Tell all people, everywhere

Mark 16:15, 20 Then he [Jesus] told them: *Go and preach the good news to everyone in the world. … [20]Then the disciples left and preached everywhere.* The Lord was with them, and the miracles they worked proved that their message was true. CEV

Continue to tell others the gospel despite suffering for doing so

Acts 5:40, 42 They [the Jewish council] *called the apostles in, beat them, and told them not to speak in the name of Jesus again*. Then they let them go free. … [42]*Every day in the Temple and in people's homes they* [the apostles] *continued teaching the people and telling the Good News—that Jesus is the Christ.* NCV™

Do not be ashamed of the gospel, even despite suffering for it

Rom 1:16 [Paul:] For *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes*, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. NET

2Tim 1:8 [Paul, to Timothy:] So *do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, a prisoner for his sake, but by God's power accept your share of suffering for the gospel*. NET

Try to persuade people to believe and respond to the gospel

Acts 17:2–4 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days *he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3]explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." [4]And some of them were persuaded* and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ESV

2Cor 5:11a [Paul:] *As people who know what it means to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.* GW

Paul's healthy fear of Christ (cf. vv. 9–10) motivated him to please Christ by trying to persuade people to respond to the gospel.

b) What Things to Explain

Who Jesus Christ is

Acts 9:20 Soon he [Paul] went to the Jewish meeting places and started *telling people that Jesus is the Son of God*. CEV

Acts 18:5 Now when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, *testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ*. NET

Acts 2:36 [Peter, to a crowd of largely Jews:] Therefore *let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.* NET

Jesus Christ's life and deeds

Acts 2:22 [Peter:] *Listen to these words*, fellow-Israelites! *Jesus of Nazareth was a man whose divine authority was clearly proven to you by all the miracles and wonders which God performed through him*. You yourselves know this, for it happened here among you. GNT

Jesus Christ's death and resurrection

1Cor 15:1, 3–5 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, *the gospel that I preached to you*, that you received and on which you stand, ... [3]For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received – *that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, [4]and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, [5]and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve*. NET

The outcomes of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection

2Cor 5:19 [Paul:] What we mean is that *God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace.* CEV

Acts 26:22–23 [Paul:] I have experienced help from God to this day, and so *I stand testifying to both small and great, saying nothing except what the prophets and Moses said was going to happen: [23]that the Christ was to suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, to proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.* NET

> As a result of Jesus' resurrection, people have been given the "light of salvation" (GNT). This involves the promise of their own resurrection, as alluded to in v. 23 by the reference to Jesus Christ being "the first" to rise from the dead.

The kingdom of God

Acts 28:23b *From morning until evening he* [Paul] *explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God* and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets. NET

What God is like and what he has done . . .

Ps 96:2–3 Sing to the Lord! Bless his name! *Proclaim his deliverance every day! [3]Declare his glory among the nations and his awesome deeds among all the peoples!* ISV

Acts 17:23–27 [Paul, to the people of Athens:] For as I went around and observed closely your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'To an unknown god.' Therefore what you worship without knowing it, *this I proclaim to you. [24]The God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, [25]nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone. [26]From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live, [27]so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.* NET

. . . including what God has done for you

Ps 118:14, 17 [A psalmist:] *The Lord gives me strength and protects me; he has become my deliverer." ... [17]I will not die, but live, and I will proclaim what the Lord has done.* NET

Luke 8:39 [Jesus, to a man he had healed:] *"Return to your home, and declare what God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole town what Jesus had done for him.* NET

What else you have seen and heard (of God and Jesus Christ)

Acts 22:15 [Ananias, to Saul/Paul:] You will *be his witness to all people, telling them about what you have seen and heard*. NCV™

How people should respond

Acts 20:21 [Paul:] *To Jews and Gentiles alike I gave solemn warning that they should turn from their sins to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.* GNT

c) How to Spread the Message

Present the gospel accurately and plainly

Acts 18:25 He [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and with great enthusiasm *he spoke and taught accurately the facts about Jesus*, although he knew only the baptism of John. NET

2Cor 4:2b [Paul:] We use no trickery, and *we do not change the teaching of God. We teach the truth plainly*, showing everyone who we are. Then they can know in their hearts what kind of people we are in God's sight. NCV™

The manner in which to present the gospel message

1Pet 3:15b–16a *Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you,* [16]*but do it with gentleness and respect.* GNT

Col 4:6 *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone.* NET

Defending or speaking of the gospel message is probably primarily in view here. The expression "seasoned with salt" most likely means either interesting (CEV, GNT) or pure.

Spread the gospel by the Holy Spirit

1Pet 1:12 They were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through *those who proclaimed the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit* sent from heaven – things angels long to catch a glimpse of. NET

Spreading the gospel by the Holy Spirit involves relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance and power.

Spread the gospel boldly . . .

Acts 9:28 So he [Saul] was staying with them, associating openly with them in Jerusalem, *speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord*. NET

. . . Spread the gospel boldly with God's help

1Thes 2:2 [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] As you remember, we had been mistreated and insulted at Philippi. *But God gave us the courage to tell you the good news about him, even though many people caused us trouble.* CEV

Work hard at spreading the gospel message

Col 1:28–29 [Paul:] So we preach Christ to everyone. With all possible wisdom we warn and teach them in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature individual in union with Christ. [29]*To get this done I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies and which is at work in me.* GNT

Note that here Paul is probably referring to his evangelistic work in spreading the gospel as well as to his pastoral work amongst Christians.

Note: Spreading the gospel is not to be done for profit . . .

2Cor 2:17 [Paul:] For *we are not like so many others, hucksters who peddle the word of God for profit*, but we are speaking in Christ before God as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God. NET

. . . Take measures not to be a financial burden

1Thes 2:9 [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] You remember, brothers, our labor and toil. *We worked night and day so that we would not become a burden to any of you while we proclaimed the gospel of God to you.* ISV

d) Supplementary Actions

Pray for your proclamation of the gospel . . .

Acts 4:29–31 [The early believers:] And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and *grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,* [30]*while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* [31]*When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.* NET

. . . and pray for others who proclaim the gospel

Col 4:3–4 [Paul, to believers:] *Be sure to pray that God will make a way for us to spread his message and explain the mystery about Christ,* even though I am in jail for doing this. [4]*Please pray that I will make the message as clear as possible.* CEV

Pray for the salvation of unbelievers

Rom 10:1 [Paul:] Brothers and sisters, *my heart's desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation.* NET

Rather than insist on your own rights, act in the interests of others for the sake of the gospel

1Cor 9:12 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] If others have the right to expect this from you, don't we deserve even more? But *we haven't used our rights. Instead, we would put up with anything in order not to hinder the Good News of Christ in any way.* GW

1Cor 10:33 [Paul, to believers:] Just *do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved.* GNT

Live and act in a way that is consistent with the gospel

Phil 1:27 [Paul, to believers:] Only *conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ* so that – whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent – I should hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, by contending side by side for the faith of the gospel, ... NET

> Conducting oneself "in a manner worthy of the gospel" – a manner consistent with its message – is an important aspect of "contending... for the faith of the gospel".

In acting consistently with the gospel, you will not be discredited . . .

2Cor 6:3 [Paul:] *We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ...* ESV

> Paul asserts that he and companions did nothing that would discredit their ministry and so be an obstacle to anyone's response.

. . . You will have credibility, attracting others to the gospel

2Cor 6:4 [Paul:] But *in everything and in every way we show that we truly are God's servants.* CEV

Titus 2:9–10 [Paul, instructing Titus what to teach believing slaves:] *Slaves are to submit themselves to their masters in everything, aiming to please them and not argue with them* [10]*or steal from them. Instead, they are to show complete and perfect loyalty, so that in every way they may make the teaching about God our Savior more attractive.* ISV

Support others spreading the gospel

2Cor 11:7–8 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you could be exalted, because *I proclaimed the gospel of God to you free of charge*? [8]I robbed other churches by *receiving support from them so that I could serve you!* NET

> Various churches supported Paul in his work of preaching the gospel, allowing him to preach it free of charge.

Note: Guard the gospel message

1Tim 6:20 [PAUL:] Timothy, *guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the pointless discussions and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.* ISV

Gal 2:4–5 [PAUL:] However, false brothers were secretly brought in. They slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in the Messiah Jesus so that they might enslave us. [5]But *we did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.* ISV

We are to guard the gospel message from being distorted. As such we need to guard: our own understanding and version of the gospel (cf. 1Tim 6:20 ▯); and the gospel message from being distorted by others (v. 5 ▯).

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Insights

This section provides insights on the gospel message itself and on why it is so critical that we tell others the gospel. It also teaches us that in all our efforts to do so, we must bear in mind that the effectiveness of the message comes from God – and that people's responses to it are in his hands, not ours.

a) Insights on the Gospel Message

The gospel is not made up by men – it is true

Gal 1:11–12 [PAUL:] Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that *the gospel I preached is not of human origin.* [12]*For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.* NET

Acts 26:25–26 But Paul replied, "I have not lost my mind, most excellent Festus, but *am speaking true and rational words.* [26]*For the king knows about these things*, and I am speaking freely to him, because *I cannot believe that any of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner.* NET

Verse 26 makes a very important point attesting to the truth of the gospel. The events it is based on were widely known, familiar to the king, as they did not take place in some obscure setting.

The gospel reveals God's hidden mystery concerning Jesus Christ

Eph 3:8b–9 [PAUL:] To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, *to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* [9]*and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, …* ESV

The gospel is of God's grace

Acts 20:24 [PAUL:] But I don't place any value on my life, if only I can finish my race and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus of testifying to *the gospel of God's grace.* ISV

The gospel message about Jesus Christ is founded on and manifests God's grace.

The gospel is good news

Acts 10:36a God sent his word to the people of Israel and brought them *the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ.* GW

Note that the Greek word which is often translated as "gospel" basically means "good news".

The message of Jesus Christ is a stumbling block for many people

1Pet 2:7–8a This stone is worth much to you who believe. But *to the people who do not believe, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."* [8]*Also, he is "a stone that causes people to stumble, a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they do not obey what God says …* NCV™

Verse 7 speaks of Jesus Christ as the "stone" that was rejected but which has become the cornerstone of God's kingdom. Verse 8 tells of how the gospel's message of Jesus Christ – with his death and resurrection – is a stumbling block for many people. They do not believe and obey it. So, figuratively speaking, on the path to God's salvation they stumble and fall over Christ – and so fail to obtain salvation and life.

Those who do not believe and respond to the gospel will be condemned

2Thes 2:12 The result is that *all who have not believed the truth, but have taken pleasure in sin, will be condemned.* GNT

b) The Need to Spread the Gospel

We have been entrusted with the task of telling the gospel to others . . .

Gal 2:7 [PAUL:] In fact, they saw that *I had been entrusted with telling the Good News to people who are not circumcised as Peter had been entrusted to tell it to those who are circumcised.* GW

Paul had a special commission to preach the gospel (as did Peter). But the principle of being entrusted with telling others the gospel is applicable to all Christians.

. . . We are responsible for telling others

Rom 1:14–15 [Paul:] For *I have an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant.* [15]*So then, I am eager to preach the Good News to you* also who live in Rome. GNT

Like Paul, believers have an obligation or responsibility to tell all people – people of all nations and levels of understanding.

Through believers spreading the gospel message others come to believe . . .

John 17:20 [Jesus:] I'm not praying only for them [the disciples]. I'm also praying for *those who will believe in me through their message*. GW

Acts 4:4a But *a lot of people who had heard the message believed it*. CEV

. . . and there are many ready to respond to the gospel – but they need someone to tell them

Matt 9:36–38 When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37]Then he said to his disciples, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.* [38]*Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."* NET

Rom 10:14 How are they [non-Christians] to call on one they have not believed in? And *how are they to believe in one they have not heard of? And how are they to hear without someone preaching to them?* NET

The gospel brings salvation, saving those who respond to it

Eph 1:13a [Paul, to the Ephesian believers:] And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, *the Good News that brought you salvation*. GNT

Mark 16:15b–16 [Jesus, to his disciples:] Go into all the world and *preach the gospel to every creature.* [16]*The one who believes and is baptized will be saved*, but the one who does not believe will be condemned. NET

The gospel brings life to those who respond

Acts 5:20 [An angel, to the apostles:] "Go and stand in the temple and keep on telling the people *the whole message about this life*." ISV

The gospel message tells of the spiritual life that can be gained through Jesus Christ.

c) God and the Gospel's Effectiveness

See also:

- *a) Prologue: God Draws People to Himself*, p. 170

The gospel is the power of God to save – though it may seem foolish to the world

Rom 1:16 [Paul:] For I am not ashamed of *the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes*, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. NET

1Cor 1:18 [Paul:] For *the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* NET

The gospel is not dependent on us and our presentation of it – but on the Holy Spirit and God's power

1Cor 2:4–5 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] *My conversation and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power,* [5]*so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on the power of God.* NET

2Cor 4:7 [Paul:] But *we have this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power comes from God and not from us.* ISV

Believers are like jars of clay, holding the treasure of the gospel. The weakness of their humanity and their often unimpressive appearance serve to show that the "extraordinary power" accompanying the message – moving people to respond, at times through miracles – is from God and not of themselves.

The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus Christ to people, fostering belief

John 15:26–27 [Jesus, to his disciples:] When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father – *the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me,* [27]and you also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. NET

1Cor 12:3 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] So I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is cursed," and *no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* NET

> No one can acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord except by the Holy Spirit, with his enlightenment and conviction about Jesus Christ.

God and Jesus Christ at times confirm the gospel message by miracles . . .

Acts 14:3 So they [Paul and Barnabas] stayed there for a considerable time, *speaking out courageously for the Lord, who testified to the message of his grace, granting miraculous signs and wonders to be performed through their hands.* NET

. . . Miracles lead people to turn to God

Rom 15:18–19a [Paul:] I will be bold and speak only about *what Christ has done through me to lead the Gentiles to obey God. He has done this by means of words and deeds,* [19]*by the power of miracles and wonders, and by the power of the Spirit of God.* GNT

d) Further Insights regarding the Gospel

Believers are to be light for the world

Acts 13:47 [Paul and Barnabas:] For this is what the Lord has commanded us: *'I have appointed you to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'* NET

Matt 5:14–16 *You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden.* [15]*People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.* [16]*In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven.* NET

> Christians are to be light for the world, showing the way of God by their character and actions – as well as by spreading the gospel (cf. Acts 13:47).

Insights regarding spreading the gospel

John 4:36–38 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Already, the one who harvests is being paid and is gathering crops for eternal life. So the one who plants and the one who harvests celebrate at the same time.* [37]*Here the saying is true, 'One person plants, and another harvests.'* [38]*I sent you to harvest a crop that you did not work on. Others did the work, and you get to finish up their work.* NCV™

> Here Jesus refers to the disciples harvesting souls for eternal life. "Others" (v. 38) may refer to the prophets including John the Baptist and possibly Jesus himself. These others had done the preparatory work for the kingdom and the gospel, and the time was now right – and still is today – to harvest the benefits of their work. Jesus' words may also enunciate a principle which is often seen with the spread of the gospel: some people sow or tell the message, often without any apparent response – while later others, following on from this previous work, lead many to respond.

Rom 10:15b As it is written, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!"* ISV

> Spreading the good news is a beautiful thing to do.

2Cor 4:13–14 [Paul, to believers:] *The scripture says, "I spoke because I believed." In the same spirit of faith, we also speak because we believe.* [14]*We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus and take us, together with you, into his presence.* GNT

> Paul's faith and belief in God – including his confidence that God would raise himself and others from death (v. 14) – motivated Paul to pursue his work of telling others the gospel.

Those who spread the gospel will be blessed

1Cor 9:23 [Paul:] *I do all this for the sake of the gospel in order to have a share in its blessings.* ISV

The gospel has spread far and wide . . .

Acts 19:20 In that way *the word of the Lord kept spreading and triumphing.* ISV

Col 1:6a [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] This Good News is present with you now. *It is producing results and spreading all over the world* as it did among you from the first day you heard it. GW

The phrase "all over the world" refers to how the gospel was spreading throughout the world Paul knew. However today, two thousand years later, the phrase is very much applicable in a literal sense.

. . . The gospel will be preached to all nations before the end

Matt 24:14 And *this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

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CHAPTER 36

Standing Firm

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I. General

The New Testament contains numerous warnings and exhortations to be faithful to God and to hold to the Christian faith. It is every Christian's constant challenge to do so. We need to stand firm, until the end – while ever watching for Jesus Christ's return and the fulfillment of our hope.

a) Be Faithful to God

Be faithful to God and Jesus Christ

1Ki 8:61 [Solomon, to the people:] *May you, his people, always be faithful to the Lord our God, obeying all his laws and commands, as you do today."* GNT

Acts 11:23 When he arrived and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad and *urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts*. GNT

Hold fast to God and his ways

2Ki 18:6 For *he* [Hezekiah] *held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses*. ESV

Serve God faithfully

1Sam 12:24 Obey the Lord and *serve him faithfully with all your heart*. Remember the great things he has done for you. GNT

Do not be unfaithful to God by not keeping his commands

1Chr 10:13 So Saul died because *he was unfaithful to the Lord and did not obey the Lord's instructions;* he even tried to conjure up underworld spirits. NET

Do not forsake God

2Chr 29:6 [Hezekiah, to the priests and Levites of Judah:] For *our fathers were unfaithful; they did what is evil in the sight of the Lord our God and abandoned him! They turned away from the Lord's dwelling place and rejected him.* NET

God protects and blesses those who are faithful to him

Ps 31:23 Love the Lord, all his faithful people. *The Lord protects the faithful*, but punishes the proud as they deserve. GNT

1Sam 26:23a *The Lord rewards those who are faithful* and righteous. GNT

God punishes those who are unfaithful

Neh 1:8b [God, to the Israelites:] *If you act unfaithfully, I will scatter you among the nations.* NET

b) Remember God and His Word

Ensure you remember God

Deut 8:11, 18 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *Be sure you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments,* ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today. ... [18]*You must remember the Lord your God,* for he is the one who gives ability to get wealth; if you do this he will confirm his covenant that he made by oath to your ancestors, even as he has to this day. NET

Remember what God has done

1Chr 16:12 *Recall the miraculous deeds he performed, his mighty acts and the judgments he decreed, ...* NET

Remember God's word and commands

Ps 119:16, 93 [A psalmist, to God:] *I will take pleasure in your laws and remember your words. ...* [93]*I won't ever forget your teachings, because you give me new life by following them.* CEV

Persistently meditate on God's word and commands . . .

Ps 119:97, 148 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *O how I love your law! All day long I meditate on it. …* [148]*My eyes anticipate the nighttime hours, so that I can meditate on your word.* NET

. . . Keep God's word and commands in your heart and thoughts

Deut 11:18a [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Take these words of mine to heart and keep them in mind.* GW

Deut 6:6–9 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *"Let these words that I'm commanding you today be always on your heart.* [7]*Teach them repeatedly to your children. Talk about them while sitting in your house or walking on the road, and as you lie down or get up.* [8]*Tie them as reminders on your forearm, bind them on your forehead,* [9]*and write them on the door frames of your house and on your gates."* ISV

God's commands are to be on the hearts of his people (v. 6). As such his people should take steps to keep his commands in their thoughts (vv. 7–9).

Note: Forgetting God has dreadful consequences

Deut 8:19 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship them and bow down to them, I warn you today that you will be destroyed.* NCV™

c) Hold to the Faith

See also:

- *a) Be Faithful to God and Endure*, p. 437

Continue in the faith

Acts 14:22 They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to *continue in the faith*, saying, "We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions." NET

The body of Christian beliefs is often referred to as "the faith".

Stand firm

1Cor 15:58a [PAUL:] My dear friends, *stand firm and don't be shaken.* CEV

Hold to Christian teaching . . .

2Thes 2:15 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] So, brothers and sisters, stand strong and *continue to believe the teachings we gave you in our speaking and in our letter.* NCV™

. . . Continue to live by Christian teaching

3Jn 1:3 [JOHN, TO HIS FRIEND GAIUS:] I was so happy when some fellow-Christians arrived and told me *how faithful you are to the truth—just as you always live in the truth.* GNT

Grow in the faith and in your knowledge

Phil 1:25 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS:] Since I'm convinced of this, I know that I will continue to live and be with all of you. This will help you to *grow and be joyful in your faith.* GW

Col 1:10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You will produce fruit in every good work and *grow in the knowledge of God.* NCV™

The final phrase quite likely speaks of growing or increasing in knowledge about God, quite possibly encompassing coming to know him better (cf. CEV, NIrV, NLT). But note that some commentators interpret Paul to be speaking of "the knowledge of God" as the sphere in which we grow, or the means by which we grow.

Grow in all aspects of your Christian life . . .

2Pet 1:5–8 For this very reason, *make every effort to add to your faith* [moral] *excellence, to excellence, knowledge;* [6]*to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness;* [7]*to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love.* [8]For if *these things are really yours and are continually increasing*, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately. NET

. . . and produce spiritual “fruit”

Gal 5:22–23 But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23]*gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* NET

These characteristics are described as “fruit of the Spirit” because their source and means of growth is the Holy Spirit – like fruit from a tree. The implication is that our lives should produce such “fruit”.

d) Persist until the End

Stand firm until the end

Matt 24:13 [Jesus, to his disciples:] But *the one who endures to the end will be saved.* ESV

Persist so that you will receive the reward . . .

Rom 2:7 *He* [God] *will give everlasting life to those who search for glory, honor, and immortality by persisting in doing what is good.* GW

Heb 10:35–36 So *do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward.* [36]*For you need endurance in order to do God’s will and so receive what is promised.* NET

. . . Be like an athlete, striving for a prize

2Tim 4:7–8 [Paul:] *I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith!* [8]*Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day* – and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing. NET

Be careful not to turn away from God . . .

Heb 3:12 *Be careful, brothers and sisters, that none of you ever develop a wicked, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* GNT

Heb 2:1 Therefore *we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* NET

. . . Do not rebel against God

Num 14:9a *Only do not rebel against the Lord.* ESV

Josh 22:29 [The Israelites:] *Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord by turning back today from following after the Lord* by building an altar for burnt offerings, sacrifices, and tokens of peace aside from the altar of the Lord our God located in front of his dwelling place! NET

Some people do fall away

1Tim 4:1a *The Spirit says clearly that in later times some believers will desert the Christian faith.* GW

Falling away brings dire consequences

John 15:6 [Jesus:] *If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; and such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and are burned up.* NET

e) Be Ready for Jesus Christ’s Return

See also:

- *b) The Timing of Jesus Christ’s Return*, p. 157

Wait eagerly for Jesus Christ’s return and for all that will follow

Phil 3:20–21 [Paul:] We, however, are citizens of heaven, and *we eagerly wait for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven.* [21]*He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power by which he is able to bring all things under his rule.* GNT

Jude 1:21 Keep yourselves in God’s love as you *wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever.* NCV™

As we do not know when Jesus Christ will come, keep watch and be ready

Matt 24:42–44 “So *keep on watching, because you don’t know on what day your Lord is coming.*

[43]*But be sure of this: if the owner of the house had known when during the night the thief would be coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into.* [44]*So you, too, must be ready, because at an hour you are not expecting him the Son of Man will come."* ISV

To be ready for Jesus Christ's return, live a godly life . . .

1Tim 6:14 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Do what you were commanded to do without wrong or blame until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.* NCV™

Likely Paul mentions Christ's return (v. 14) to inspire Timothy to obey his instructions in order to be ready for it.

. . . and live a constructive life

Matt 25:19–21 *Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.* [20]*And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.'* [21]*His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'* ESV

The returning master (v. 19; cf. 24:50 ⇩) represents Jesus Christ on his return, whereupon he will reward his faithful servants.

Do not live an ungodly life, leaving you unprepared for Jesus Christ's return

Matt 24:48–51 But *if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,'* [49]*and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards,* [50]*the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know* [51]*and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* ESV

Do not be deceived by false claims, for Christ's return will be only after certain events – and obvious to all

Matt 24:4–14, 26–27 *Jesus answered them* [his disciples], *"Watch out that no one misleads you.* [5]*For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many.* [6]*You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Make sure that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but the end is still to come.* [7]*For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.* [8]*All these things are the beginning of birth pains.* [9]*"Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name.* [10]*Then many will be led into sin, and they will betray one another and hate one another.* [11]*And many false prophets will appear and deceive many,* [12]*and because lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold.* [13]*But the person who endures to the end will be saved.* [14]*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. …* [26]*So then, if someone says to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe him.* [27]*For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.* NET

2Thes 2:3 *Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For the Day will not come until the final Rebellion takes place and the Wicked One appears, who is destined for hell.* GNT

The "Day" is the day of Christ's return. The "Wicked One" is quite likely the first beast of Revelation 13, understood by many to be a final antichrist.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Spiritual Warfare

See also:

- *5. Angels, Satan and Demons*, p. 41

Living as God wants necessarily means involvement in spiritual warfare. Believers are faced with challenges from spiritual adversaries and also from within themselves. Although the forces that oppose believers are formidable, the Bible gives clear instructions on how to counter any threat – through the supreme power of God.

a) The Existence of Spiritual Warfare

Believers are involved in conflict of a spiritual nature

1Tim 1:18b [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] I tell you this so you can follow them and *fight the good fight*. NCV™

The Greek rendered here as "fight the good fight" alludes to warfare (cf. AMP), in contrast to the Greek behind the same rendering later in 6:12. As such it refers to or at least reflects the spiritual warfare in which believers are involved.

Believers have spiritual enemies . . .

Eph 6:12 For *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.* NET

Although believers may have human opponents, primarily and ultimately their struggle is against spiritual powers.

. . . Believers have Satan as an enemy

1Pet 5:8 Be sober and alert. *Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.* NET

Believers have human enemies, spiritually opposed to them

Phil 1:28a *Be brave when you face your enemies.* Your courage will show them that they are going to be destroyed, and it will show you that you will be saved. CEV

Believers have human enemies who are opposed to them in regard to spiritual matters – notably in seeking to prevent the spread of the gospel and/or in seeking to impose their own opposing beliefs.

Believers face internal spiritual conflict

1Pet 2:11 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and exiles to keep on abstaining from *the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.* ISV

Gal 5:17 For *the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other*, so that you cannot do what you want. NET

The opposing desires of the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers, produce spiritual conflict within believers. Note that the final clause is probably speaking of the influence of the sinful nature in hindering one from doing the good one wants to do – in conflict with the Holy Spirit. Alternatively, it possibly could be speaking of the Spirit helping us to not indulge the desires that we naturally want to fulfill.

God and Jesus Christ aid believers in spiritual warfare, enabling them to overcome

2Tim 4:18 [PAUL:] *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* Glory belongs to him forever and ever! Amen. ISV

Rom 8:31, 37–39 [PAUL:] What then shall we say about these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us? ...* [37]No, *in all these things we have complete victory through him* [Christ] *who loved us!* [38]*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers,* [39]*nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* NET

b) Engaging in Spiritual Warfare

Believers are to engage in spiritual warfare both in standing firm in their faith and in advancing the cause of God's kingdom. Generally speaking, the former has a defensive sense and the latter an offensive sense.

Be on your guard against spiritual dangers

2Pet 3:17b *Be on your guard, then, so that you will not be led away by the errors of lawless people and fall from your safe position.* GNT

Resist Satan

James 4:7 So submit to God. But *resist the devil and he will flee from you.* NET

1Pet 5:9 *Be firm in your faith and resist him* [Satan], because you know that your fellow-believers in all the world are going through the same kind of sufferings. GNT

Use spiritual weapons and armor

2Cor 10:3–4 [PAUL:] For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, [4]for *the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds.* We tear down arguments ... NET

Eph 6:13–15 For this reason, *take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.* [14]*Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness,* [15]*by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace,* ... NET

Verse 15 is most likely speaking of believers having a strong grasp of the truths of the gospel so as to be ready for action (cf. NASB, NCV, NKJV). Possibly a readiness to proclaim this gospel is in view (cf. CEV, GNT, NRSV).

Spiritual weapons and armor include: faith; . . .

Eph 6:16 *At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One.* GNT

1Pet 1:4b–5 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] It is reserved in heaven for *you,* [5]*who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* NET

. . . God's word; . . .

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation and *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* NET

The description of God's word as "the sword of the Spirit" reflects its: power; offensive and defensive roles; spiritual nature; and importance to the work of the Holy Spirit. Note that the "helmet of salvation" may well have in view the hope of salvation (cf. 1Thes 5:8).

. . . and prayer

Matt 6:13 [PRAYER TO GOD:] *Don't allow us to be tempted. Instead, rescue us from the evil one.* GW

Eph 6:18 *Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.* CEV

In the face of evil (cf. vv. 11, 13), believers should keep on praying – not just for themselves but for all God's people.

c) Counteraction of Demons

Distinguishing between the Holy Spirit and demons

1Jn 4:1–3, 6 [JOHN:] Dear friends, stop believing every spirit. Instead, *test the spirits to see whether they are from God,* because many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2]*This is how you can recognize God's Spirit: Every spirit who acknowledges that Jesus the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God.* [3]*But every spirit who does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.* You have heard that he is coming, and now he is already in the world. ... [6]*We belong to God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever does not belong to God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.* ISV

In vv. 1–3, "spirit" refers to a spirit influencing a person. Having in view a particular heresy that was facing his readers, John indicates that they could tell if the spirit in a prophet (v. 1; CEV, GNT, NLT) is the

Holy Spirit or an evil one by whether or not the prophet acknowledged Jesus Christ, in particular whether they acknowledged that he had come in the flesh. To do so would be indicative of the Holy Spirit's enlightenment and conviction. Presumably this test for recognizing the Holy Spirit can be applied to other biblical truths about Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor 12:3).

Additionally, one can infer from v. 6 that prophets or teachers who do not listen to the teachings of the apostles are not from God and are under the influence of evil spirits.

Jesus Christ drove out demons . . .

Mark 1:34, 39 *So he healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons.* But he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ... [39]So *he went into all of Galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons*. NET

. . . Jesus Christ gave some of his followers similar authority over demons

Mark 6:7, 13 He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. *He gave them authority over the evil spirits ...* [13]*They drove out many demons*, and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them. GNT

These verses show that Jesus gave his disciples authority over demons. They do not imply that this authority is necessarily given to all believers.

Demons are driven out of people in Jesus Christ's "name"

Acts 16:18 She [a girl with an evil spirit] continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and *said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out of her at once*. NET

To do things in Jesus Christ's "name" involves acting: as his representative; by his authority; and in accordance with his will. It involves acting in reliance on his power, by faith in him.

The Holy Spirit, faith and prayer also figure in the driving out of demons

Matt 12:28 [Jesus:] But if *I cast out demons by the Spirit of God*, then the kingdom of God has already overtaken you. NET

Matt 17:18–20 Then Jesus spoke sternly to the demon. It went out of the boy, and right then he was healed. [19]Later the disciples went to Jesus in private and asked him, *"Why couldn't we force out the demon?"* [20–21]*Jesus replied: It is because you don't have enough faith! But I can promise you this. If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there. And it would. Everything would be possible for you.* CEV

Mark 9:28–29 Then, after he [Jesus] went into the house, his disciples asked him privately, *"Why couldn't we cast it out?"* [29]*He told them, "This kind can come out only by prayer."* NET

d) Ungodly Spiritualistic Practices

In conjunction with engaging in spiritual warfare, we are not to engage in any ungodly spiritualistic practices, which ultimately involve cooperative interaction with demons and even Satan.

Do not practice witchcraft or other occult practices

Deut 18:10–11 [Moses, to the Israelites:] *You must never sacrifice your sons or daughters by burning them alive, practice black magic, be a fortuneteller, witch, or sorcerer,* [11]*cast spells, ask ghosts or spirits for help, or consult the dead.* GW

Do not consult anyone who does perform occult practices

Lev 19:31a *Do not go for advice to people who consult the spirits of the dead.* GNT

Isa 47:13–14a [God, to the Babylonians:] *You are powerless in spite of the advice you get. Let your astrologers come forward and save you— those people who study the stars, who map out the zones of the heavens and tell you from month to month what is going to happen to you.* [14]*"They will be like bits of straw, and a fire will burn them up! They will not even be able to save themselves ...* GNT

Do not have other “gods” or idols

Ex 20:2–6 [God, to the Israelites:] “I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 3*“You shall have no other gods before me.* 4*“You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below.* 5*You shall not bow down to them or serve them*, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, 6and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. NET

Other “gods” or idols are lifeless . . .

Ps 135:15–17 *The nations’ idols are made of silver and gold, they are man–made.* 16*They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see,* 17*and ears, but cannot hear. Indeed, they cannot breathe.* NET

. . . and so they are useless

1Sam 12:21 *Idols are of no use, so don’t worship them. They can’t help you or save you. They are useless!* NCV™

Worship of idols is correlated with worship of demons

1Cor 10:19–20 [Paul, to believers:] I do not mean that the food sacrificed to an idol is important. I do not mean that an idol is anything at all. 20But I say that *what is sacrificed to idols is offered to demons*, not to God. And I do not want you to share anything with demons. NCV™

> Although idol worshipers may believe that they are offering sacrifices to an idol, they are in reality ultimately offering them to demons.

Having other “gods” is detrimental to our relationship with God

Deut 31:18 [God, referring to the Israelites:] *On that day I will certainly turn away from them because of all the evil they’ve done in turning to other gods.* GW

Having other “gods” will culminate in God’s retribution

Josh 24:20 [Joshua, to the Israelites:] *If you abandon the Lord and worship foreign gods, he will turn against you; he will bring disaster on you and destroy you,* though he once treated you well. NET

Note: Other “gods” and idolatry are not restricted to physical images

Phil 3:19 [Paul, speaking of enemies of the gospel:] Their destiny is destruction, *their god is their belly,* and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on worldly things. ISV

> Here “belly” possibly is being used as a metaphor for “bodily desires” (GNT, cf. NCV). Regardless, Paul clearly has in view a mindset focused on earthly or worldly things, making them one’s top priority, effectively one’s “god”.

Eph 5:5 You may be sure that no one who is immoral, indecent, or greedy (for *greed is a form of idolatry*) will ever receive a share in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. GNT

> Greedy people effectively put material things in the place of God. As such they are “serving a false god” (NCV).

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 37

Rejecting Sin

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I. Encountering Sin

Inevitably on occasions sin "leaks" into our lives, with its ill effects on ourselves and on our relationship with God. But if we address it as the Bible says to, God promises to forgive our sins and take in hand its effects.

Note that the teaching in this section is applicable to both new believers ridding themselves of their old ways and to believers returning to God after having lapsed into sin. However, the focus is more on the latter – with the former being primarily dealt with in the section ., p. 227.

a) Consequences of Sin for God's People

See also:

- *d) God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons*, p. 190

Prelude: God's people still sin

James 3:2a [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] For *we all stumble in many ways*. NET

1Jn 1:8 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *If we say that we do not have any sin, we are deceiving ourselves* and we're not being truthful within ourselves. ISV

No one's sinful nature has been completely eradicated.

Sin deprives God's people of his blessings

Jer 5:25 [GOD, TO UNFAITHFUL ISRAEL:] *Your misdeeds have stopped these things from coming. Your sins have deprived you of my bounty.* NET

Sin deprives God's people of rest

Jer 6:16 The LORD said to his people: "You are standing at the crossroads. So consider your path. *Ask where the old, reliable paths are. Ask where the path is that leads to blessing and follow it. If you do, you will find rest for your souls." But they said, "We will not follow it!"* NET

This indicates that if one does not walk in God's ways – i.e. continues to sin – one fails to find rest for one's soul.

God punishes sin, which can mean physical suffering and emotional anguish . . .

Ps 38:3–8 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *My whole body is sick because of your judgment; I am deprived of health because of my sin. [4]For my sins overwhelm me; like a heavy load, they are too much for me to bear. [5]My wounds are infected and starting to smell, because of my foolish sins. [6]I am dazed and completely humiliated; all day long I walk around mourning. [7]For I am overcome with shame and my whole body is sick. [8]I am numb with pain and severely battered; I groan loudly because of the anxiety I feel.* NET

. . . along with various other troubles

Ps 40:12 [DAVID:] For *evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me*. ESV

The clause "my iniquities have overtaken me" refers to the results of David's sins, which had overwhelmed him.

Sin defiles God's people – making them spiritually unclean

Ps 106:39 *They* [the sinful Israelites] *were defiled by their deeds*, and unfaithful in their actions. NET

Lam 1:8a *Jerusalem has sinned greatly, therefore she has become unclean.* ISV

God turns away from those who persist in sin

Mic 3:4 *Someday these sinners will cry to the LORD for help, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time, because they have done such wicked deeds.* NET

As sin makes people spiritually unclean, God will ultimately turn away from those who persist in sin, for God in his holiness will not coexist with such uncleanness.

Further implications of deliberately or habitually continuing to sin

1Jn 3:6 So anyone who lives in Christ does not go on sinning. *Anyone who goes on sinning has never really understood Christ and has never known him.* NCV™

Heb 10:26–27 For *if we deliberately keep on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins is left for us,* [27]*but only a certain fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume God's enemies*. NET

To deliberately keep on sinning after having previously accepted Christ's sacrifice as payment for sin is effectively to spurn Christ's sacrifice. The result is that one is left without any possible "further sacrifice for sins" (v. 26) and so faces God's judgment and dreadful punishment (v. 27).

b) Addressing Sin (I): Return from Sin to God

See also:

- *b) Repentance*, p. 227

Even if sin has not led to a believer completely falling away from God, all sin hinders one from being fully devoted to God to some extent. Thus one needs to turn away from any sin and return to being completely devoted to God.

Stop sinning, turning away from sin

1Cor 15:34a Sober up as you should, and *stop sinning!* NET

2Tim 2:19 *"Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from evil."* NET

Do not be stubborn, resisting God and persisting in sin

Heb 3:7–8 [THE WRITER, TO HEBREW BELIEVERS:] So then, as the Holy Spirit says: *"If you hear God's voice today,* [8]*do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were when they rebelled against God, as they were that day in the desert when they put him to the test.* GNT

Jer 5:3 [JEREMIAH, SPEAKING TO GOD ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but *they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.* ESV

So get rid of sin . . .

Ezek 18:31 *Get rid of all the sins you have done*, and get for yourselves a new heart and a new way of thinking. Why do you want to die, people of Israel? NCV™

. . . and get rid of things involved in sinful practices

Judg 10:16 *They threw away the foreign gods they owned* and worshiped the LORD. Finally the LORD grew tired of seeing Israel suffer so much. NET

Return to God

Lam 3:40 Let us carefully examine our ways, and *let us return to the LORD*. NET

Return to God with all your heart

Joel 2:12–13 "Yet even now," the LORD says, *"return to me with all your heart – with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your garments!"* [13]*Return to the LORD your God*, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and boundless in loyal love – often relenting from calamitous punishment. NET

In returning from sin to God, do what God wants

Ezra 10:11 [EZRA THE PRIEST, TO THE UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE:] Now then, confess your sins to the LORD, the God of your ancestors, *and do what pleases him*. GNT

Hos 12:6 [HOSEA, TO ISRAEL:] But *you must return to your God, by maintaining love and justice*, and by waiting for your God to return to you. NET

c) Addressing Sin (II): Deal with Sin before God

Confess your sin to God

Lev 5:5 As soon as you discover that you have committed any of these sins, *you must confess what you have done*. CEV

Neh 1:6–7 [Nehemiah, to God:] *I confess the sins that we Israelites have committed against you. Both I and my father's house have sinned.* [7]*We have abandoned you by not keeping your commands, your ceremonies, and your judgments that you proscribed to your servant Moses.* ISV

Be sorrowful over your sin

Ps 51:17 *The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin.* NCV™

A "broken" spirit or heart is one that is deeply remorseful.

Humble yourself before God over your sin – and its consequences

Luke 18:13 *The tax collector, however, stood far off and would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am!'* NET

2Chr 33:12–13 *In his pain Manasseh asked the Lord his God for mercy and truly humbled himself before the God of his ancestors.* NET

Manasseh had been exiled because of his sin (cf. vv. 9–11).

Ask God for forgiveness and restoration

Ps 51:1–2, 7–12 [David, to God after his sin with Bathsheba:] *God, be merciful to me because you are loving. Because you are always ready to be merciful, wipe out all my wrongs.* [2]*Wash away all my guilt and make me clean again. ...* [7]*Take away my sin, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.* [8]*Make me hear sounds of joy and gladness; let the bones you crushed be happy again.* [9]*Turn your face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt.* [10]*Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again.* [11]*Do not send me away from you or take your Holy Spirit away from me.* [12]*Give me back the joy of your salvation. Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit.* NCV™

In petitioning God, express your anguish over consequences of your sin – even with fasting

Joel 1:13–14 [Joel, to the priests in Jerusalem:] *"Put on your mourning clothes, you priests; and cry aloud,* you ministering servants at the altar! Come! *Stay the night in mourner's clothes,* you ministers of my God, *because withheld is the grain offering and the wine offering from the temple of your God.* [14]*Set apart time for a fast!* Call a solemn assembly! Gather the elders and everyone living in the land to the temple of the Lord your God, and *cry out to the Lord!"* ISV

Apparently as a consequence of the people's sin, an awesome plague of locusts had devastated the land of Judah, leaving neither grain nor wine even for offerings (v. 13b). Thus the prophet calls on the priests – and similarly the people (cf. vv. 5–12) – to express their anguish before God (vv. 13–14a), in conjunction with crying out to God for help (v. 14b).

Note: Accept God's discipline for sin

Prov 3:11–12 [A wise father, to his son:] *My child, do not despise discipline from the Lord, and do not loathe his rebuke.* [12]*For the Lord disciplines those he loves, just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.* NET

2Sam 15:25–26 The king told Zadok, "Take God's ark back to the city. If the Lord looks favorably on me, he will allow me to come back and see both it and its dwelling place again. [26]*But if he says, 'I'm not pleased with you,' let him do to me what he considers right."* GW

d) God's Response to Repentance

Prelude: God seeks to draw his wayward people back to himself

Isa 65:2 [God:] *I spread out my hands all day long to my rebellious people,* who lived in a way that is morally unacceptable, and who did what they desired. NET

Jer 35:15 [God, to the people of Judah:] *I sent all my servants the prophets to warn you over and over again. They said, "Every one of you, stop doing the evil things you have been doing and do what is right. Do not pay allegiance to other gods and worship them.* NET

When we repent God forgives our sins . . .

Isa 1:16–18 [God, to the people of Judah:] *Wash! Cleanse yourselves! Remove your sinful deeds from my sight. Stop sinning!* [17]*Learn to do what is*

right! Promote justice! Give the oppressed reason to celebrate! Take up the cause of the orphan! Defend the rights of the widow! [18]Come, let's consider your options," says the LORD. *"Though your sins have stained you like the color red, you can become white like snow; though they are as easy to see as the color scarlet, you can become white like wool.* NET

The repentant actions (vv. 16b–17) were critical to God forgiving the people's sins (v. 18b).

1Jn 1:9 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] But *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness*. NET

. . . Being merciful and compassionate, God saves us from the consequences of our sin

Deut 30:2–3 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, [2]and *return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul,* [3]*then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you*. ESV

Prov 28:13 [SOLOMON:] *If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.* NCV™

Note that the assertion in the above subheading does not mean that the consequences of our sin are always completely eradicated (cf. 2Sam 12:9–14).

When we repent God restores our relationship with him

Zec 1:3 So tell the people [of Judah]: This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: *'Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the LORD All-Powerful.* NCV™

Jer 24:7b [GOD:] *I will be their God and they will be my people. For they will wholeheartedly return to me.* NET

Here God in effect promises his unfaithful people that if they returned to him wholeheartedly, he would restore his relationship with them to what it should be. As such, they would again be his people and he would be their God.

Note: Not repenting and returning to God brings judgment

Jer 44:5–6 [GOD:] But *the people of Jerusalem and Judah would not listen or pay any attention. They would not stop the wickedness they were doing nor quit sacrificing to other gods.* [6]*So my anger and my wrath were poured out and burned like a fire through the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. That is why they have become the desolate ruins that they are today.* NET

Rev 2:16 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM:] *Therefore, repent! If not, I will come against you quickly and make war against those people with the sword of my mouth.* NET

The reference to "the sword of my mouth" possibly means that the judgment would be in accordance with Jesus Christ's words or pronounced by his word/s and thus come into being. In effect his words would "cut like a sword" (CEV).

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy

The Bible does not merely tell us not to sin. It also helps us not to do so by giving sound instructions and alternatives to sin. In conjunction with this, the Bible calls us to be holy – i.e. to live pure lives, set apart from all that is ungodly.

a) Avoiding Sin

See also:

- *e) Epilogue: Be Wary*, p. 419

Take care not to sin

1Cor 10:12 *Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall.* CEV

Ask God for help to avoid sin . . .

Ps 19:13 [David, to God:] Moreover, *keep me from committing flagrant sins; do not allow such sins to control me.* Then I will be blameless, and innocent of blatant rebellion. NET

. . . For God and Jesus Christ are willing and able to help us withstand temptation

1Cor 10:13 [Paul, to believers:] No temptation has overtaken you that is unusual for human beings. But *God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. Instead, along with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it.* ISV

Heb 4:15–16 For *we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one* [Christ] *who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin.* [16]*Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help.* NET

Note that being tempted to sin is not sinning. But giving in to temptation is.

Use God's word to avoid sin

Ps 119:9, 11 [A psalmist, to God:] *How can a young person maintain a pure life? By guarding it according to your instructions! ...* [11]*In my heart I store up your words, so I might not sin against you.* NET

Avoid sinful desires . . .

1Pet 2:11 [Peter, to believers:] Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and exiles to *keep on abstaining from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.* ISV

. . . Sinful desires lead to sin

James 1:14–15 [James, speaking of people in general:] But *each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.* [15]*Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin*, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death. NET

Indulging sinful desires leads to temptation and then to sin.

Renew your mind and take care what you think about

Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to this present world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect. NET

Prov 4:23 *Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.* NCV™

Get rid of sinful influences

Matt 18:8–9 [Jesus, speaking figuratively:] *If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.* It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. [9]*And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.* It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into fiery hell. NET

These instructions are not meant to be taken literally. They are hyperbole, emphasizing that one should do whatever is needed to get rid of sinful influences and avoid sin.

Avoid all evil

1Thes 5:22 *Stay away from every form of evil.* NET

Hate evil and sin

Prov 8:13 [WISDOM PERSONIFIED:] To fear the LORD is to *hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and twisted speech.* GW

Along with hating evil, love what is good

Amos 5:15a *Hate evil and love good.* GW

b) Alternatives to Sin

Instead of living by the sinful nature, live by the Holy Spirit

Rom 8:3b–5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He [God] condemned sin in the flesh [4]so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who *do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* [5]For *those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ISV

Our human nature ("the flesh") is essentially sinful. But God has given his Holy Spirit to believers. As such, we are to live by God's Holy Spirit. This involves: being both alert to and responsive to the Spirit's promptings; and being reliant on his power, to enable and transform us. In conjunction with this, our minds should be focused on "things of the Spirit" (v. 5).

Instead of living in darkness, live according to the light

Eph 5:8–9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *In the past you were full of darkness, but now you are full of light in the Lord. So live like children who belong to the light.* [9]*Light brings every kind of goodness, right living, and truth.* NCV™

When used figuratively, particularly in the NT, "darkness" represents evil and falseness, and is associated with spiritual ignorance. Believers once lived in the darkness, in a sense being "full of darkness" (v. 8). But now believers are to live in God's "light", which is a metaphor for holiness and truth. Doing so consists primarily of living according to the spiritual light and truth that we have from God's word.

Instead of living as a slave to sin, live as a slave to righteousness and God . . .

Rom 6:19b, 22 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Just as you once offered the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater disobedience, so now, in the same way, you must offer the parts of your body as slaves to righteousness that leads to sanctification.* ... [22]But now that *you have been freed from sin and have become God's slaves*, the benefit you reap is sanctification, and the result is eternal life. ISV

. . . In avoiding sin be focused on doing what is right

Amos 5:14a *Make it your aim to do what is right, not what is evil*, so that you may live. GNT

Bear in mind that one of the most effective preventative measures against sinning is to be preoccupied with doing good.

Pursue righteousness

1Tim 6:11 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] But you, as a person dedicated to God, keep away from all that. Instead *pursue righteousness*, godliness, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. NET

Matt 5:6 Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, for they will be satisfied. NET

Be good

2Pet 1:5 For this very reason *do your best to add goodness to your faith*; to your goodness add knowledge; ... GNT

Luke 6:45 *The good person out of the good treasury of his heart produces good*, and the evil person out of his evil treasury produces evil, for his mouth speaks from what fills his heart. NET

c) Be Holy (I): General

See also:

- *b) God Makes His People Holy*, p. 189

To be holy involves being separated from corruptive influences and totally dedicated to God. As such it includes moral purity and obedience to God. The ongoing process of becoming increasingly holy is largely facilitated by God, but in accordance with it believers are called upon to be holy. (See also the introductory comment on *God Makes His People Holy*, p. 189.)

Be holy, because God is holy

1Pet 1:14–16 [Peter, to believers:] As obedient children, do not be shaped by the desires that you once had in your ignorance. 15Instead, *just as the one who called you is holy, be holy in every aspect of your life.* 16*For it is written, "You must be holy, because I am holy."* ISV

If we are to be God's people, acceptable to him, we need to be holy because: God is holy and so does not accept anything that is not holy. Therefore we should aspire to be holy, like God.

Be pure . . .

1Tim 5:1b–2, 22 [Paul, to Timothy:] *Treat younger men like brothers,* 2*older women like mothers, and younger women like sisters, with absolute purity.* ... 22Do not ordain anyone hastily. Do not participate in the sins of others. *Keep yourself pure.* ISV

James 3:17a But *the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure*, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. NCV™

. . . Be blameless

Deut 18:13 *You must be blameless before the* Lord *your God.* NET

Make every effort to be holy and pure – particularly in view of what is to come

2Pet 3:11–14 [Peter, to believers:] *Since all these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people should you be? Your lives should be holy and dedicated to God,* 12*as you wait for the Day of God* and do your best to make it come soon—the Day when the heavens will burn up and be destroyed, and the heavenly bodies will be melted by the heat. 13But *we wait for what God has promised: new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home.* 14*And so, my friends, as you wait for that Day, do your best to be pure and faultless in God's sight and to be at peace with him.* GNT

Some things that lead to holiness

Rom 6:19b [Paul, to believers:] Just as you once offered the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater disobedience, so now, in the same way, *you must offer the parts of your body as slaves to righteousness that leads to sanctification.* ISV

2Cor 7:1 [Paul, to believers:] Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, *bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* ESV

Fear of God facilitates holiness.

Some things that lead to purity

1Jn 1:9 But *if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.* GNT

1Jn 3:2–3 Dear friends, we are now God's children, but what we will be like has not been revealed yet. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is. 3And *everyone who has this hope based on him keeps himself pure, just as he is pure.* ISV

The "hope" of Jesus Christ's return and of being like him (v. 2) leads one to make or keep themselves pure (v. 3). For focusing on such a hope makes anything that it is not pleasing to Christ incompatible with one's own goals and desires. Additionally one would not want to do anything that would bring Christ's disapproval on his return.

We should be holy and pleasing to God because of what he has done for us

Rom 12:1 [Paul:] I therefore urge you, brothers, *in view of God's mercies*, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God*, for this is the reasonable way for you to worship. ISV

d) Be Holy (II): Being Set Apart

Being holy involves being set apart for God from worldly things. Such things include: compromising associations with the people of this world; and the ways of the world.

Be set apart for God

Lev 20:7 [God, to the Israelites:] Therefore *separate yourselves and be holy,* because I am the Lord your God. ISV

Ezra 6:21 The lambs were eaten by the Israelites who had returned from exile and by *all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of the non-Jews in the land to worship the Lord God of Israel.* GW

Do not love this world

1Jn 2:15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ESV

Do not conform to this world

Rom 12:2 *Do not be conformed to this present world,* but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well–pleasing and perfect. NET

In the NT the "world" often refers to the system of values, attitudes and behaviour commonplace in society – along with the people and social structures that conform to this system. This system is largely antagonistic towards or dismissive of God. As such, the "world" is essentially evil, and so it is imperative that believers do not conform to it – nor love it (cf. 1Jn 2:15 ⇩).

Do not live as other people do . . .

Eph 4:17 [Paul, to believers:] So I tell you and encourage you in the Lord's name *not to live any longer like other people in the world. Their minds are set on worthless things.* GW

. . . Worldly behavior to be avoided

1Jn 2:16 *These are the ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have.* None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from the world. NCV™

Avoid bad company . . .

Ps 26:4–5 [David:] *I do not keep company with worthless people; I have nothing to do with hypocrites. 5I hate the company of the evil and avoid the wicked.* GNT

. . . Bad company is corruptive and harmful

1Cor 15:33 Do not be deceived: *"Bad company corrupts good morals."* NET

Prov 13:20 The one who associates with the wise grows wise, but *a companion of fools suffers harm.* NET

Avoid compromising alliances

2Cor 6:14–15 *Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? 15And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever?* NET

This appears to be speaking against forming close, binding associations with unbelievers that would risk leading a believer to compromise aspects of their faith and/or inhibit their service and witness to Christ. Additionally, basic differences between believers and unbelievers mean that such relationships lack: fellowship (v. 14); agreement (v. 15); and things in common (v. 15). Probably Paul had primarily in mind affiliations either with false teachers who had appeared in the Corinthian church or pagan idolaters. Note that "Beliar" (v. 15a) is Satan.

Note: God's people are not of this world . . .

John 15:19 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the world, so you don't belong to it.* That is why the world hates you. NCV™

. . . God's people are in effect strangers in this world

1Pet 2:11 [Peter, to believers:] Dear friends, *you are like foreigners and strangers in this world.* I beg you to avoid the evil things your bodies want to do that fight against your soul. NCV™

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 38

Major Pitfalls

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I. Pride

Pride is one of the greatest dangers to one's life as a believer, yet it is also one of the most subtle. Pride has an adverse effect on both one's relationship with God and one's relationships with others. The opposite to pride is humility, which correspondingly is very much a key factor in living an ongoing and effective Christian life.

a) Pride in Thought

Do not be proud or conceited

Jer 13:15 [JEREMIAH:] Hear and give ear; *be not proud*, for the LORD has spoken. ESV

Gal 5:26 *Let us not become conceited*, provoking one another, being jealous of one another. NET

Do not be arrogant

1Cor 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; *it is not arrogant* … ESV

Do not think you are better than others

Deut 17:20 *He* [the king] *should not think he is better than his fellow Israelites*, and he must not stop obeying the law in any way so that he and his descendants may rule the kingdom for a long time. NCV™

Do not be wise in your own eyes . . .

Isa 5:21 *How horrible it will be for those who think they are wise and consider themselves to be clever.* GW

. . . Seeing yourself as wise is in fact associated with foolishness

Prov 26:12 *Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.* NET

Do not be self-righteous

Luke 18:9–14 *Jesus also told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else.* [10]"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11]*The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself like this: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: extortionists, unrighteous people, adulterers – or even like this tax collector.* [12]*I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.'* [13]The tax collector, however, stood far off and would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am!' [14]*I tell you that this man went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" NET

Do not embrace praise from people – particularly in preference to praise from God

John 5:41, 44 [JESUS, TO THE JEWS:] *I do not accept praise from people, … …* [44]*How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don't seek the praise that comes from the only God?* NET

Note: Pride can easily stem from riches and power

Ezek 28:5 [GOD, TO THE RULER OF TYRE:] By your great skill in trade you have increased your wealth, and *your heart is proud because of your wealth*. NET

2Chr 26:16a But *once he became powerful, his pride* destroyed him [Uzziah]. NET

b) Pride in Action: Self-Exaltation and Boasting

See also:

- *O*, p. 147

Do not exalt yourself . . .

Prov 25:6 *Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of the great; …* NKJV

. . . Honor others, rather than yourself

Rom 12:10 [Paul, to believers:] Love each other as brothers and sisters and *honor others more than you do yourself.* CEV

Phil 2:3 [Paul, to believers:] Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to *treat one another as more important than yourself.* NET

> In accordance with honoring others rather than ourselves, we should treat others as more important.

Do not dress lavishly for outward appearances

1Pet 3:3–4 [Peter, addressing wives:] *You should not use outward aids to make yourselves beautiful, such as the way you do your hair, or the jewelry you put on, or the dresses you wear.* [4]*Instead, your beauty should consist of your true inner self, the ageless beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of the greatest value in God's sight.* GNT

> To dress lavishly is in effect an attempt to exalt ourselves in the eyes of others. Correspondingly, it evidences vanity, which is also closely associated with pride.

Those who exalt themselves will be humbled – and those who humble themselves will be exalted

Matt 23:12 And *whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* NET

Do not boast about yourself . . .

1Cor 13:4b *Love does not brag,* it is not puffed up. NET

Prov 27:2 *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.* NET

. . . Only boast about God

Jer 9:23–24 The Lord says, *"Wise people should not boast that they are wise. Powerful people should not boast that they are powerful. Rich people should not boast that they are rich.* [24]*If people want to boast, they should boast about this: They should boast that they understand and know me. They should boast that they know and understand that I, the Lord, act out of faithfulness, fairness, and justice in the earth and that I desire people to do these things," says the Lord.* NET

> If one has to boast, one should boast about matters that count, primarily knowledge of God and his attributes and deeds.

Boasting about oneself typically is bad

James 4:16 [James, to some of his readers:] But now *you are proud, and you boast; all such boasting is wrong.* GNT

Boasting is of no benefit . . .

Jer 48:30 I know his [Moab's] gall," declares the Lord, "and it's futile; *the boasting that they do is futile.* ISV

. . . Boasting leads to trouble

Prov 17:19b *Whoever brags a lot is asking for trouble.* NCV™

c) Outcomes of Pride

Pride is very detrimental to a relationship with God . . .

Deut 8:14 [Moses, to the Israelites:] ... *make sure that you do not become proud and forget the Lord your God* who rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves. GNT

Ps 10:4 [A psalmist, to God:] *The wicked are too proud to turn to you or even think about you.* CEV

> In their pride, the wicked have no desire and see no need to seek God, often due to a perceived self-sufficiency. Being "full of themselves" they have no room for God in their lives.

. . . Arrogance is also detrimental – notably in not obeying God's commands

Neh 9:16, 29a [Levites, to God:] But *they—our own ancestors—acted arrogantly. They became stubborn and wouldn't obey your commands.* ... [29]You warned them in order to bring them back to your teachings, but *they became arrogant and would not obey your commandments.* GW

Pride and arrogance lead to ill treatment of others

Ps 31:18 Silence those liars— *all the proud and arrogant who speak with contempt about the righteous*. GNT

Ps 10:2 *In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor …* ESV

Pride is associated with self-deception and flawed understanding

Obad 1:3–4 [GOD, TO THE NATION OF EDOM:] *Your pride has deceived you. Your capital is a fortress of solid rock; your home is high in the mountains, and so you say to yourself, 'Who can ever pull me down?' 4Even though you make your home as high as an eagle's nest, so that it seems to be among the stars, yet I will pull you down.* GNT

1Tim 6:4a [PAUL, SPEAKING OF A TYPICAL FALSE TEACHER:] *This person is full of pride and understands nothing,* but is sick with a love for arguing and fighting about words. NCV™

Pride leads to one's downfall – in contrast to humility

Prov 18:12 *Before destruction the heart of a person is proud, but humility comes before honor.* NET

God punishes the proud and arrogant . . .

Prov 16:5 *The LORD detests those who are proud; truly they will not go unpunished.* ISV

Mal 4:1a *"Certainly the day is coming! It will burn like a furnace. All arrogant people and all evildoers will be like straw. The day that is coming will burn them up completely," says the LORD of Armies.* GW

. . . God humbles the proud

Isa 2:11–12 *A day is coming when human pride will be ended and human arrogance destroyed. Then the LORD alone will be exalted. 12On that day the LORD Almighty will humble everyone who is powerful, everyone who is proud and conceited.* GNT

d) Antithesis of Pride: Humility

Humility is the opposite of pride. It is a most critical attitude for maintaining one's guard against things that can cause one to fall – spiritually and otherwise. This is in contrast to pride which opens oneself up to many kinds of destructive dangers (as reflected in the previous section, *Outcomes of Pride*).

Be humble, particularly before God

Mic 6:8b This is what the LORD requires from you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to *live humbly with your God*. GW

Dan 10:12 Then he [an angelic messenger] said to me, "Don't be afraid, Daniel, for from the very first day you applied your mind to understand and to *humble yourself before your God*, your words were heard. I have come in response to your words. NET

Humbly acknowledge your unworthiness before God

Gen 18:27 Abraham spoke again: "*Please forgive my boldness in continuing to speak to you, Lord. I am only a man and have no right to say anything.* GNT

Luke 7:6–7 So Jesus went with them. When Jesus wasn't far from the house, *the officer sent some friends to tell him, "Lord, don't go to any trouble for me! I am not good enough for you to come into my house. 7And I am certainly not worthy to come to you.* Just say the word, and my servant will get well. CEV

Fast as a means of humbling yourself before God

Ezra 8:21 [EZRA THE PRIEST:] *I called for a fast there by the Ahava Canal, so that we might humble ourselves before our God* and seek from him a safe journey for us, our children, and all our property. NET

Possibly fasting is seen as a means of humbling oneself as it heightens our sense of our own weakness and insufficiency, particularly as we come before God.

Be humble towards others

Eph 4:2a *Be humble and gentle in every way.* GW

1Pet 5:5b And all of you, *clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.* NET

Humility is important for obeying and serving God

Phil 2:5–8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, [6]who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, [7]but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. [8]He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross!* NET

Jesus Christ's example illustrates the role of humility in obeying and serving God, thus pointing to the importance of humility for doing so.

God cares for and blesses the humble

Ps 18:27 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You rescue the humble,* but you put down all who are proud. CEV

Ps 25:9 [DAVID, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.* ESV

1Pet 5:6 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Humble yourselves, then, under God's mighty hand, so that he will lift you up in his own good time.* GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Riches and Sex

Riches and sex are both good in themselves; in fact they are blessings from God. However they both are easily and often misused, bringing ill effects for both ourselves and others. Indeed, few things have the capacity of riches or sex for both good and harm. So it should be no surprise that they feature so prominently in the Bible's teaching on our relationships with others and moreover our relationship with God.

a) Riches and Godliness

See also:

- *c) Justice and the Needy (I): Instructions*, p. 349
- *d) Justice and the Needy (II): Insights*, p. 350

Riches are a barrier to a relationship with God

Matt 6:19–21, 24 *Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth*, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. [20]But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. [21]*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. …* [24]*"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.* NET

Mark 10:23, 25 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, *"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! …* [25]*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."* NET

Riches in fact draw one away from God . . .

1Tim 6:9–10 But *people who want to get rich keep toppling into temptation and are trapped by many stupid and harmful desires that plunge them into destruction and ruin.* [10]*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, in their eagerness to get rich, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with much pain.* ISV

. . . Contrastingly, the poor are given prominence as recipients of the gospel and God's kingdom

Luke 4:18a [Jesus:] The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because *he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.* NET

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! *Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?* NET

It would appear that James is making a generalization, as obviously not all who are poor are rich in faith, and presumably some who are not poor will have a part in the kingdom.

Desire for riches can lead to mistreatment of others

2Pet 2:3a [Peter, speaking of false teachers:] And *in their greed they will exploit you* with deceptive words. NET

Prov 18:23 *The poor person pleads for mercy, the wealthy man responds harshly.* ISV

The rich are often unmerciful in their pursuit of increased wealth.

So, do not love money . . .

1Tim 3:2–3 [Paul, speaking of Christian leaders:] The overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self–controlled, respectable, hospitable, an able teacher, [3]not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not contentious, *free from the love of money.* NET

Eccl 5:10 *The one who loves money will never be satisfied with money, he who loves wealth will never be satisfied with his income. This also is futile.* NET

. . . Be content with what you have

Heb 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for God has said, "I will never leave you or abandon you."* ISV

1Tim 6:6–8 *Now godliness combined with contentment brings great profit.* [7]For we have brought nothing into this world and so we cannot take a single thing out either. [8]But *if we have food and shelter, we will be satisfied with that.* NET

Note: Wealth ultimately comes from God

1Chr 29:12 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You are the source of wealth and honor;* you rule over all. You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all. NET

> Bear in mind that the knowledge that wealth ultimately comes from God is no reason to keep it for oneself. Rather, one must use wealth wisely, remembering that: riches give one great potential for good – for God's kingdom and for helping others; and there are grave potential pitfalls associated with accumulating riches (as the other subsections in this and the following section indicate). Also note that the knowledge that wealth ultimately comes from God rather than our own efforts, should encourage us to not be focused on chasing wealth.

b) Further Warnings about Riches

Riches are not secure . . .

1Tim 6:17 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Tell those who have the riches of this world not to be arrogant and *not to place their confidence in anything as uncertain as riches*. Instead, they should place their confidence in God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. GW

. . . and we do not know what the future holds

Prov 27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow; for you do not know what a day may bring forth.* NET

> We do not know what the future holds, for ourselves or our riches.

Life does not last and the dead cannot take their riches with them

Ps 49:10 *Surely one sees that even wise people die; fools and spiritually insensitive people all pass away and leave their wealth to others.* NET

1Tim 6:7 For *we did not bring anything into the world, and surely we cannot take anything out of it.* ISV

Hoarding riches will bring ill consequences in the afterlife

Luke 6:24–25a [JESUS:] But *woe to you who are rich, for you have received your comfort already.* [25]*"Woe to you who are well satisfied with food now, for you will be hungry.* NET

Luke 16:9–12 [JESUS:] And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by how you use worldly wealth, so that when it runs out you will be welcomed into the eternal homes. [10]*"The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.* [11]*If then you haven't been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches?* [12]*And if you haven't been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you your own?* NET

> Verse 9 indicates that the afterlife is primarily in view. One must use worldly wealth for the benefit of others (v. 9), as opposed to hoarding it. Those who have not used worldly wealth – comparatively "very little" (v. 10) – as they ought to have, will not be given the "true riches" (v. 11) of God's kingdom – i.e. "much" (v. 10) wealth. Note that in v. 10, "unrighteous" (NASB) and "unjust" (NKJV) are alternative translations to "dishonest".

Other shortcomings of riches

Prov 11:4 *Wealth won't help in the time of judgment,* but righteousness will deliver from death. ISV

Prov 13:8 *The rich may have to pay a ransom for their lives, but the poor will face no such danger.* NCV™

Eccl 5:11 *The more wealth people have, the more friends they have to help spend it. So what do people really gain? They gain nothing except to look at their riches.* NCV™

c) Sexual Sin

Avoid sexual sin . . .

Eph 5:3 [Paul, to believers:] But *among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind*, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. NET

John 8:3–4, 7–11 The experts in the law and the Pharisees *brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery*. They made her stand in front of them [4]and said to Jesus, "Teacher, *this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. …* [7]When they persisted in asking him, he stood up straight and replied, "Whoever among you is guiltless may be the first to throw a stone at her." [8]Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. [9]Now when they heard this, they began to drift away one at a time, starting with the older ones, until Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. [10]Jesus stood up straight and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" [11]She replied, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. *Go, and from now on do not sin any more*." NET

. . . Be pure

2Cor 7:1 [Paul:] Dear friends, we have these promises from God, so *we should make ourselves pure—free from anything that makes body or soul unclean. We should try to become holy in the way we live*, because we respect God. NCV™

Sexual sin has ill consequences

1Cor 6:18 Keep on running away from sexual immorality. *Any other sin that a person commits is outside his body, but the person who sins sexually sins against his own body.* ISV

> In contrast to other sins, sexual sin involves the misuse and mistreatment of one's own body. Moreover, Paul seems to imply that sexual sin adversely affects the body or one's being in a deeper way than any other sin (cf. CEV, GNT, NLT).

2Pet 2:18–19 [Peter, speaking of false teachers:] For by speaking high–sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error. [19]*Although these false teachers promise such people freedom, they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved.* NET

> The false teachers promised that their immoral way would bring freedom, but ironically they themselves had become subject to and controlled by such immorality (v. 19; cf. 1Cor 6:12). Presumably sexual sin is primarily in view.

Sexual sin ultimately results in God's judgment

Heb 13:4 Marriage must be honored among all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, for *God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers*. NET

Note: The sexually immoral who believe and repent are forgiven

Luke 7:37–38, 47–50 *Then when a woman of that town, who was a sinner, learned that Jesus was dining at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfumed oil.* [38]*As she stood behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfumed oil. …* [Jesus:] [47]*Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, thus she loved much*; but the one who is forgiven little loves little." [48]*Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."* [49]But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" [50]*He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* NET

> In being described as "a sinner" (v. 37), the woman was likely a prostitute. In v. 47a, Jesus is saying that the great love she had shown him (vv. 37–38) demonstrated that her many sins had been forgiven – rather than saying that it was the reason for why they were forgiven; for it was her faith that saved her (v. 50). One can infer that the love she showed Jesus was an expression of her faith – and presumably of her repentance as well.

d) Prohibited Forms of Sex

See also:

- *D*, p. 346

▪ *D*, p. 371

Lust

Job 31:1 [Job:] But *I made an agreement with my eyes not to look with desire at a girl.* NCV™

Matt 5:27–28 [Jesus:] You have heard that it was said, 'You must not commit adultery.' [28]*But I say to you, anyone who stares at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* ISV

Gazing longingly at a woman with sexual desire, is committing adultery in one's heart and in a spiritual sense.

Sex apart from marriage

Deut 22:21b [Moses, speaking of any woman who had had premarital sex:] *She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by having sexual relations before she was married.* You must get rid of the evil among you. NCV™

Moses' words are of course also applicable to males.

Prostitution

1Cor 6:15 [Paul, to believers:] *Surely you know that your bodies are parts of Christ himself. So I must never take the parts of Christ and join them to a prostitute!* NCV™

Prov 23:27 *A prostitute is a deep pit.* GW

Homosexual acts

Rom 1:26–27 [Paul, speaking of ungodly people:] For this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions. For *their women exchanged the natural sexual relations for unnatural ones,* [27]*and likewise the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed in their passions for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.* NET

This indicates that homosexual relations are unnatural. In v. 27, the phrase "received in themselves the due penalty" implies that the committing of such acts carries its own natural consequences.

Incest

Lev 18:6 *No man is to approach any close relative to have sexual intercourse with her.* I am the Lord. NET

Bestiality

Lev 18:23a And *you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.* ESV

e) Epilogue: Be Wary

Be alert and sober

1Thes 5:6 So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must *stay alert and sober.* NET

Watch yourself . . .

Acts 20:28 So *keep watch over yourselves* and over all the flock which the Holy Spirit has placed in your care. GNT

. . . Watch and guard yourself against sinning

Ps 39:1a [David:] I decided, *"I will watch what I say and make sure I do not sin with my tongue.* NET

Mal 2:16 So *guard yourselves in your spirit,* and do not be faithless. ESV

To "guard yourself in your spirit" involves watching and evaluating such things as one's attitudes, motives and conscience – effectively one's thoughts.

Examine and evaluate yourself

Lam 3:40 *Let us test and examine our ways,* and return to the Lord! ESV

Keep a clear conscience . . .

Acts 23:1 Paul looked straight at the Council and said, "Brothers, *with a clear conscience I have done my duty before God up to this very day.*" ISV

. . . A good conscience is vital for governing ourselves in pleasing God

2Cor 1:12 [Paul, to the Corinthian believers:] We are proud that *our conscience assures us that our lives in this world, and especially our relations with you, have been ruled by God-given frankness and sincerity*, by the power of God's grace, and not by human wisdom. GNT

Evaluate all things

1Thes 5:21 *Test all things*; hold fast what is good. NKJV

Heb 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, for those [believers] who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to *distinguish good from evil*. ESV

Do not be deceived, nor deceive yourself

James 1:16 *Do not be deceived*, my dear brothers and sisters! GNT

1Jn 1:8 [John, to believers:] *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves*, and the truth is not in us. ESV

Beware: Sin is deceptive

Heb 3:13 [The writer, to believers:] But exhort one another each day, as long as it is called "Today," that none of you may become hardened by *sin's deception*. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 39

Hard Times

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I. General

Hard times are experienced by all Christians. This reality is reflected in the Bible, notably in Job and Psalms. But the Bible also shows that there are a number of practical and effective things that we can do when undergoing hard times.

Note that the next chapter looks at experiencing persecution because of one's faith. This current chapter deals with undergoing hard times in general – particularly when one is hurting or "down" – irrespective of whether such times are a result of one's faith or not. As such the responses discussed in this chapter, supplement or reinforce the responses to persecution that are given in the following chapter.

a) Prologue: God's People Still Have Hard Times

See also:

- *d) God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons*, p. 190
- *e) God Disciplines His People (II): Insights*, p. 191
- *I. The Persecution of God's People*, p. 432

Trouble is characteristic of human life

Job 5:7 [ELIPHAZ:] But *a person is born for trouble as surely as sparks fly up from a fire*. GW

Ps 90:10a The days of our lives add up to seventy years, or eighty, if one is especially strong. But *even one's best years are marred by trouble and oppression*. NET

The wicked oppress the righteous and the poor

Amos 5:12 [GOD, TO THE WICKED:] I know how terrible your sins are and how many crimes you have committed. *You persecute good people, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts.* GNT

Examples of God's people undergoing hard times

1Ki 19:3–4 *Elijah was afraid, so he got up and fled for his life* to Beer Sheba in Judah. He left his servant there, [4]while he went a day's journey into the desert. He went and sat down under a shrub and *asked the LORD to take his life: "I've had enough! Now, O LORD, take my life. After all, I'm no better than my ancestors."* NET

Job 3:24–26 [JOB:] For *my sighing comes in place of my food, and my groanings flow forth like water. [25]For the very thing I dreaded has happened to me, and what I feared has come upon me. [26]I have no ease, I have no quietness; I cannot rest; turmoil has come upon me*. NET

Examples of God's people even attributing their plight to God

Ruth 1:20–21 Then she told them, "Don't call me Naomi any longer! Call me Mara, because *God has made my life bitter. [21]I had everything when I left, but the LORD has brought me back with nothing.* How can you still call me Naomi, when *God has turned against me and made my life so hard*?" CEV

Lam 3:1–3 *I am the man who has experienced affliction from the rod of his wrath. [2]He drove me into captivity and made me walk in darkness and not light. [3]He repeatedly attacks me, he turns his hand against me all day long.* NET

Here Jeremiah speaks on behalf of his nation, as if it was the nation speaking as one.

Note: The desire to contend with God over one's plight

Job 7:11, 20–21 [JOB, TO GOD:] "Therefore, *I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. … [20]If I have sinned – what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you set me as your target? Have I become a burden to you? [21]And why do you not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust, and you will seek me diligently, but I will be gone.*" NET

"Therefore" (v. 11) appears to refer to the misery of Job's predicament (cf. vv. 2–5) with the prospect of imminent death (cf. vv. 6–10) – and possibly also his apparent innocence (cf. 6:10, 24, 30). His circumstances being as such, he says that he will not keep silent but speak out and complain to God. In v. 21 Job asks God why he does not forgive his sins and relent, apparently reasoning that his death – by which he would pay for his sin – was now imminent anyway.

b) Mourn Loss

The actions spoken of in this section are important for dealing with grief. For they help us express it and "get it out of our system".

Mourn and weep over loss – particularly deaths

John 11:32–35 Now when Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, *my brother would not have died."* [33]When *Jesus saw her weeping, and the people who had come with her weeping*, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed. [34]He asked, "Where have you laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see." [35]*Jesus wept.* NET

Acts 8:2 *Some devout men buried Stephen, mourning for him with loud cries.* GNT

Mourn and weep before God

Josh 7:5–6 The people of Ai killed about thirty-six Israelites and then chased the rest from the city gate all the way down to the canyon, killing them as they went down the hill. When the Israelites saw this, they lost their courage. [6]*Then Joshua tore his clothes in sorrow. He bowed facedown on the ground before the Ark of the* LORD *and stayed there until evening. The leaders of Israel did the same thing. They also threw dirt on their heads to show their sorrow.* NCV™

Judg 20:25–26 The Benjaminites again attacked them from Gibeah and struck down eighteen thousand sword–wielding Israelite soldiers. [26]So all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel. *They wept and sat there before the* LORD; they did not eat anything that day until evening. They offered up burnt sacrifices and tokens of peace to the LORD. NET

Openly express your sorrow and grief

1Sam 30:3–4 When David and his men came to the city, they found it burned. Their wives, sons, and daughters had been taken captive. [4]*Then David and the men who were with him wept loudly until they could weep no more.* NET

Est 4:1 Now when Mordecai became aware of all that had been done, *he tore his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went out into the city, crying out in a loud and bitter voice.* NET

Fast in mourning

2Sam 1:12 And *they mourned and wept and fasted until evening* for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. NKJV

c) Keep in Mind God and His Word

In hard times, remember God . . .

Neh 4:14b [NEHEMIAH, SPEAKING TO HIS PEOPLE ABOUT ENEMY THREATS:] *"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the great and awesome Lord*, and fight on behalf of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your families!" NET

. . . and remember what God has done

Ps 77:7–15 [A PSALMIST:] "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? [8]Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? [9]Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah [10]*Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High."* [11]*I will remember the deeds of the* LORD*; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.* [12]*I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.* [13]*Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?* [14]*You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.* [15]*You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph*. Selah ESV

The expression "the years of the right hand of the Most High" (v. 10) speaks of the years when God's power was clearly manifested on his people's behalf. In the face of present difficulties and God's apparent rejection and inactivity (vv. 7–9), the psalmist chooses to remember and meditate on God's wonderful deeds of the past (vv. 10–12, 15), by which he finds encouragement and a revitalized view of God (vv. 13–14).

Seek God in hard times

Ps 77:2a [A PSALMIST:] *In my time of trouble I sought the Lord. I kept my hand raised in prayer throughout the night.* NET

Do not forget God's word

Ps 119:61 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *The ropes of the wicked tighten around me, but I do not forget your law.* NET

Note that the following subsections also contain verses from Psalm 119, and are likewise spoken by the psalmist to God.

Keep meditating on God's word and obeying it

Ps 119:23, 51, 166 Though rulers plot and slander me, *your servant meditates on your statutes. ...* [51]Arrogant people do nothing but scoff at me. *Yet I do not turn aside from your law. ...* [166]I hope for your deliverance, O LORD, and *I obey your commands.* NET

Job 6:10 [JOB:] Then I would have this comfort and be glad even *in this unending pain*, because *I would know I did not reject the words of the Holy One.* NCV™

Job has primarily in view his obedience to God's commands (cf. CEV), which he had not rejected amidst his great ordeal.

Put your hope in God's word

Ps 119:81 I am weak from waiting for you to save me, but *I hope in your word.* NCV™

Take comfort in God's word

Ps 119:50, 52 *This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. ...* [52]*When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O LORD.* ESV

In v. 50 the psalmist says that his comfort in suffering is God's promise which preserves or "revives" (NET) his life, through the hope that it gives (cf. v. 81 ⇧).

Delight in God's word

Ps 119:92, 111 *If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. ...* [111]*Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.* ESV

In v. 92 the psalmist asserts that he would have perished in his affliction if God's law had not "been the source of my joy" (GNT) and so "sustained me with joy" (NLT). The reason why God's word produced such joy may have primarily been because of its promises (v. 50 ⇧) and/or because the psalmist "found happiness in obeying" it (CEV).

d) Trust in God

See also:

- *b) Have Faith in God and Pray* [In persecution], p. 438

In hard times, trust in God

Ps 31:13–15 [DAVID, TO GOD:] I have heard the slander of many; It is like terror all around me, as they conspire together and plot to take my life. [14]*But I trust in you, O LORD. I say, "You are my God."* [15]*My times are in your hands.* Deliver me from the hands of my enemies and from those who pursue me. ISV

The statement: "You are my God" (v. 14) implies that the LORD is the one David trusts in as sovereign over his life, the one who held his present and future circumstances in his hands (v. 15a).

Commit yourself to God and take refuge in him . . .

Ps 31:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Into your hand I entrust my life; you will rescue me*, O LORD, the faithful God. NET

Ps 57:1 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for *in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.* ESV

. . . For God saves and protects those who take refuge in him

Ps 91:1–7, 9–12 *The one who lives in the shelter of the Most High and who abides in the shadow of the Almighty* [2]*will say to the LORD, "You are my refuge, my fortress, and my God in whom I trust!"* [3]*He will surely deliver you from the hunter's snare and from the destructive plague.* [4]*With his feathers he will cover you, and under his wings you will find safety. His truth is your*

shield and armor. [5]*You need not fear terror that stalks in the night, the arrow that flies in the day;* [6]*plague that strikes in the darkness, or calamity that destroys at noon.* [7]*If a thousand fall at your side or ten thousand at your right hand, it will not overcome you. ...* [9]*"O LORD, you are my refuge!" Because you chose the Most High as your dwelling place,* [10]*no evil will fall upon you, and no affliction will approach your tent,* [11]*for he will command his angels to protect you in all your ways.* [12]*With their hands they will lift you up so you will not trip over a stone.* ISV

Accept hard times from God

Job 2:7–10 Satan left the LORD'S presence and struck Job with painful boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. [8]Job took a piece of broken pottery to scratch himself as he sat in the ashes. [9]His wife asked him, "Are you still holding on to your principles? Curse God and die!" [10]He said to her, "You're talking like a godless fool. *We accept the good that God gives us. Shouldn't we also accept the bad?"* Through all this Job's lips did not utter one sinful word. GW

1Pet 2:19 *God will bless you for this, if you endure the pain of undeserved suffering because you are conscious of his will.* GNT

> Peter is speaking of accepting undeserved suffering (cf. v. 18) as being in accordance with God's will.

e) Hope in God and Wait for Him

In hard times, put your hope in God

Ps 42:5–6a [A PSALMIST:] *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation* [6]*and my God.* ESV

Lam 3:19–23 [JEREMIAH:] Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! [20]My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. [21]*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:* [22]*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* [23]*they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* ESV

Look resolutely and expectantly to God

Ps 25:15 [DAVID:] *I continually look to the LORD for help, for he will free my feet from the enemy's net.* NET

2Chr 20:12 [JEHOSHAPHAT, AS JUDAH FACED INVASION:] O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.* ESV

Wait for God

Isa 8:17 [ISAIAH:] *I will wait for the LORD,* who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ESV

Wait for God patiently and quietly

Ps 37:7 *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;* fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! ESV

Lam 3:26 *It is good to wait quietly for the LORD to save.* NCV™

Wait with confidence and in the knowledge that God will act

Ps 27:13–14 [DAVID:] *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!* [14]*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!* ESV

Isa 64:4 Since ancient times no one has heard or perceived, *no eye has seen any God besides you, who intervenes for those who wait for him.* NET

> Note that God's action on behalf of his troubled people is not always simply the removal of the cause of their trouble. It may instead involve strengthening his people to cope with the trouble, with inner joy and peace.

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Praying in Hard Times

Prayer is probably the most prominent positive response to hard times. The Bible shows us a great deal about praying to God in such times. The psalms in particular contain a number of prayers of people faced with great difficulties and suffering, from which we can learn much.

a) Express Your Anguish to God

See also:

- *M*, p. 423

Tell God of your plight and how you feel . . .

Ps 22:11, 14 [David, to God:] Do not remain far away from me, for *trouble is near and I have no one to help me. ...* [14]*My strength drains away like water; all my bones are dislocated; my heart is like wax; it melts away inside me.* NET

Ps 25:16–19 [David, to God:] Turn to me and have mercy on me, because *I am lonely and hurting.* [17]*My troubles have grown larger*; free me from my problems. [18]*Look at my suffering and troubles*, and take away all my sins. [19]*Look at how many enemies I have! See how much they hate me!* NCV™

As indicated, the above passages are extracts of prayers (of David). This is the case with many of the verses in the remainder of this chapter. To save space this will not be indicated on each occasion.

. . . Pour out your heart to God

Ps 62:8 Trust in him at all times, you people! *Pour out your hearts before him!* God is our shelter! (Selah) NET

1Sam 1:10, 15b, 16b *She* [Hannah] *was very upset as she prayed to the Lord, and she was weeping uncontrollably. ...* [15]*...* [Hannah, to Eli the priest:] *I have poured out my soul to the Lord.* [16]*... I have spoken from my deep pain and anguish*. NET

To pour out your heart to God involves telling God about all your concerns and feelings. In a sense it is to empty your heart of all its troubles, laying them out before God. Being "very upset" (v. 10) and in "deep pain and anguish" (v. 16), Hannah poured out her soul/heart to God (v. 15) in prayer.

Prayer anxiously speaking of God's seeming remoteness and of apparent isolation from him . . .

Ps 10:1 *Why are you so distant, Lord? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* GW

Ps 31:22a *I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight."* ESV

Note that the things said in this subsection and following in the last two subsections of this section are not necessarily exemplary in the sense of being things that we ought to say to God amidst hard times. But they do show how one can express anguish to God and suggest that it is acceptable, even productive, for the most part to express such thoughts and emotions.

. . . Consequent longing for God amidst suffering

Ps 42:1–2 *As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God!* [2]*I thirst for God, for the living God. I say, "When will I be able to go and appear in God's presence?"* NET

Prayer despairingly speaking of God as even the source of one's suffering

Ps 88:6–9a *You place me in the lowest regions of the pit, in the dark places, in the watery depths.* [7]*Your anger bears down on me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.* (Selah) [8]*You cause those who know me to keep their distance; you make me an appalling sight to them. I am trapped and cannot get free.* [9]*My eyes grow weak because of oppression.* NET

Prayer desperately asking God how long suffering and God's apparent inaction or anger is to continue

Ps 13:1–2 *How much longer will you forget me, Lord? For ever? How much longer will you hide yourself from me?* [2]*How long must I endure trouble? How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night? How long will my enemies triumph over me?* GNT

Ps 89:46 *Lord, how long will this go on? Will you ignore us forever? How long will your anger burn like a fire?* NCV™

b) Ask God for Help (I): General

See also:

- *d) Making Requests*, p. 268
- *b) Have Faith in God and Pray* [In persecution], p. 438

When facing trouble, pray to God . . .

Ps 50:15 [God:] *Pray to me when you are in trouble!* I will deliver you, and you will honor me! NET

James 5:13 *Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray.* Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praises. NET

. . . Cry out to God for help

Ps 18:6 In my distress I called to the Lord; *I cried out to my God*. From his heavenly temple he heard my voice; *he listened to my cry for help*. NET

Ask God for mercy

Ps 6:2a *Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak …* NKJV

Matt 15:22 A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, "*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!* My daughter is horribly demon-possessed!" NET

Ask God for strength

Ps 119:28 My soul melts away for sorrow; *strengthen me according to your word!* ESV

Ask God to guide you

Ps 143:8 May I hear about your loyal love in the morning, for I trust in you. *Show me the way I should go*, because I long for you. NET

Ps 61:1b–2 Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; [2]from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. *Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, …* ESV

> The "rock that is higher than I" denotes a place of safety, that seems to be beyond the psalmist's reach. Quite possibly it alludes to God himself (cf. vv. 3–4).

Ask God to protect you . . .

Ps 16:1 *Protect me, O God, for I have taken shelter in you.* NET

. . . and ask God to deliver you

Ps 69:13–14, 18 O Lord, may you hear my prayer and be favorably disposed to me! O God, because of your great loyal love, *answer me with your faithful deliverance!* [14]*Rescue me from the mud! Don't let me sink! Deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep water! …* [18]*Come near me and redeem me! Because of my enemies, rescue me!* NET

Ask God to hear and answer your prayer

Ps 102:1–2 *O Lord, hear my prayer! Pay attention to my cry for help!* [2]*Do not ignore me in my time of trouble! Listen to me! When I call out to you, quickly answer me!* NET

Persist in prayer to God

Ps 88:1 Lord, you are the God who saves me. *I cry out to you day and night.* NCV™

c) Ask God for Help (II): Things to Appeal To

God's righteousness

Ps 71:2 *Because you are righteous, help me and rescue me.* Listen to me and save me! GNT

God's steadfast love and faithfulness . . .

Ps 69:13b *O God, because of your great loyal love, answer me with your faithful deliverance!* NET

Ps 109:21, 26 But my Sovereign Lord, help me as you have promised, and *rescue me because of the goodness of your love. …* [26]*Help me, O Lord my God; because of your constant love, save me!* GNT

. . . along with God's mercy

Dan 9:18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For *we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy*. ESV

Your devotion to and relationship with God . . .

Ps 86:2–3 *Save me from death, because I am loyal to you; save me, for I am your servant and I trust in you.* [3]*You are my God, so be merciful to me*; I pray to you all day long. GNT

Ps 119:94 *I am yours, so save me, since I have sought your precepts.* ISV

. . . and God's promises to his people

Ps 119:170 Listen to my appeal for mercy! *Deliver me, as you promised.* NET

The sake of God's "name"

Ps 79:9–10 *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!* [10]*Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes!* ESV

Note: Believe that God will answer your prayer – and tell him so

Ps 6:7–9 [DAVID:] My eyes are weak from so much crying; they are weak from crying about my enemies. [8]Get away from me, all you who do evil, because *the LORD has heard my crying.* [9]*The LORD has heard my cry for help; the LORD will answer my prayer.* NCV™

Ps 17:6 *I call to you for you will answer me, O God.* Listen to me! Hear what I say! NET

d) Praise and Rejoice in God

See also:

- *d) Praise and Rejoice in God* [In persecution], p. 439

Praise and thank God amidst trouble

2Chr 20:21–22 He [Jehoshaphat] met with the people and *appointed musicians to play before the LORD and praise his majestic splendor. As they marched ahead of the warriors they said: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his loyal love endures."* [22]*When they began to shout and praise*, the LORD suddenly attacked the Ammonites, Moabites, and men from Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. NET

Job 1:20–21 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. [21]And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. *The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*." ESV

Rejoice in God amidst trouble

Hab 3:17–18 [HABAKKUK:] Even though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vines; even if the olive harvest fails, and the fields produce nothing edible; even if the flock is snatched from the sheepfold, and there is no herd in the stalls— [18]*as for me, I will rejoice in the LORD. I will find my joy in the God of my deliverance.* ISV

Determine and promise to praise and thank God for deliverance

Ps 43:1, 4 O God, declare me innocent, and defend my cause against the ungodly; *deliver me from lying and evil people!* … [4]*Then I will go to your altar, O God*; you are the source of my happiness. *I will play my harp and sing praise to you, O God, my God.* GNT

Ps 35:17b–18 [DAVID:] *Rescue me from their destructive attacks; guard my life from the young lions!* [18]*Then I will give you thanks in the great assembly; I will praise you before a large crowd of people!* NET

Praise and thank God when he answers prayer made in hard times

Ps 34:1–4 [David:] *I will praise the Lord at all times; my mouth will continually praise him.* [2]*I will boast in the Lord*; let the oppressed hear and rejoice! [3]*Magnify the Lord with me! Let's praise his name together!* [4]*I sought the Lord's help and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.* NET

Ps 107:19–21 *They cried out to the Lord in their distress; he delivered them from their troubles.* [20]He sent them an assuring word and healed them; he rescued them from the pits where they were trapped. [21]*Let them give thanks to the Lord for his loyal love, and for the amazing things he has done for people!* NET

Rejoice in God's deliverance from hard times

Joel 2:20–23 [God, to the people of Judah:] "*I will remove the northerners* [locusts] *from you*, driving them to a barren and desolate land— the front toward the Dead Sea and the back toward the Mediterranean. Their stench will rise, and their stinking odor will ascend, because they have done great things." [21]"Stop being afraid, O land! *Rejoice and be glad, because the Lord will do great things.* [22]Stop being afraid, O beasts of the field, because *the desert pastures will bloom, the trees will bear their fruit, and the fig tree and vine will deliver their wealth.* [23]*And so be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, because he has given you the right amount of early rain, and he will cause the rain to fall for you, both the early rain and the later rain as before.* ISV

> The "northerners" (v. 20) refers to an incredibly great plague of locusts that had brought desolation to the land.

e) Epilogue: God Does Respond to Suffering and Cries

God is near us in hard times and when we pray

Ps 34:18 *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted*, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed. NCV™

Deut 4:7 [Moses, to the Israelites:] In fact, *what other great nation has a god so near to them like the Lord our God whenever we call on him?* NET

God does not ignore the suffering and cries of the afflicted

Ps 22:24 *He does not neglect the poor or ignore their suffering; he does not turn away from them, but answers when they call for help.* GNT

God comforts his people in hard times

Ps 23:4 [David, to God:] *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; *your rod and your staff, they comfort me*. ESV

2Cor 1:3–4 [Paul, to believers:] Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* [4]*who comforts us in all our troubles* so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with *the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*. NET

God hears the cries of the godly and rescues them . . .

Ps 55:16–18, 22 [David:] As for me, *I will call out to God, and the Lord will deliver me.* [17]*During the evening, morning, and noontime I will lament and moan, and he will hear me.* [18]*He will rescue me and protect me from those who attack me, even though they greatly outnumber me.* ... [22]*Throw your burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain you. He will never allow the godly to be upended.* NET

Ps 91:14–15 *The LORD says, "Because he is devoted to me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he is loyal to me.* [15]*When he calls out to me, I will answer him. I will be with him when he is in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him honor.* NET

. . . God has compassion on them, saving and blessing them

Lam 3:22, 32 *The LORD's loyal kindness never ceases; his compassions never end.* ... [32]Though he causes us grief, *he then has compassion on us according to the abundance of his loyal kindness.* NET

Zec 10:6a [GOD:] *I will make the people of Judah strong; I will rescue the people of Israel. I will have compassion on them and bring them all back home.* GNT

Further testimony to God answering prayers in suffering and trouble

Ps 10:17–18 *LORD, you have heard the request of the oppressed; you make them feel secure because you listen to their prayer.* [18]*You defend the fatherless and oppressed, so that mere mortals may no longer terrorize them.* NET

Ps 34:4, 6 [DAVID:] *I sought the LORD's help and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.* ... [6]*This oppressed man cried out and the LORD heard; he saved him from all his troubles.* NET

Further specific examples of God answering prayers in suffering and trouble

Judg 3:9, 15a *When the Israelites cried out for help to the LORD, he raised up a deliverer for the Israelites who rescued them.* His name was Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ... [15]*When the Israelites cried out for help to the LORD, he raised up a deliverer for them.* His name was Ehud son of Gera the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. NET

Acts 12:5, 11 So *Peter was kept in prison, but those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him.* ... [11]*When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen."* NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 40

Persecution

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I. The Persecution of God's People

The Bible warns that faithfully following God inevitably results in persecution and difficulties. In fact in a number of countries today severe persecution of Christians is common. Additionally, the Bible speaks of a time just prior to Jesus Christ's return when persecution will be severe worldwide. But along with such warnings, the Bible gives wonderful and powerful promises of God's care for his people in the face of persecution.

a) God's People Face Persecution

Following God and Jesus Christ results in persecution . . .

2Tim 3:12 Now *in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*. NET

John 16:2–4a [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *People will put you out of their synagogues. Yes, the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are offering service to God.* [3]*They will do this because they have not known the Father and they have not known me.* [4]*I have told you these things now so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.* NCV™

. . . It brings all kinds of hardships and suffering

Acts 14:22b *"We must endure many hardships to get into the kingdom of God."* ISV

1Pet 1:6 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] This brings you great joy, although *you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials*. NET

Spreading the gospel can lead to opposition . . .

1Thes 2:2 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] But although we suffered earlier and were mistreated in Philippi, as you know, *we had the courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of much opposition*. NET

. . . and spreading the gospel can result in persecution

Acts 5:40a *They called the apostles in, beat them, and told them not to speak in the name of Jesus again.* NCV™

2Tim 1:8 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, a prisoner for his sake, but by God's power accept *your share of suffering for the gospel*. NET

God's people are hated

John 15:18–19 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *If the world hates you*, remember that it hated me first. [19]If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But *I have chosen you out of the world, so you don't belong to it. That is why the world hates you.* NCV™

God's people may face plots against them

Acts 20:19 [PAUL:] I humbly served the Lord, often with tears in my eyes. *I served the Lord during the difficult times I went through when the Jews plotted against me.* GW

b) Types of Persecution

Ridicule

Jer 20:7b–8 [JEREMIAH:] *Everyone ridicules me.* [8]*For whenever I prophesy, I must cry out, "Violence and destruction are coming!" This message from the LORD has made me an object of continual insults and derision.* NET

Verbal abuse

Acts 18:6 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to object to the statements made by Paul and *even to abuse him*. ISV

Lies and slander

Matt 5:11 [JESUS:] God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you, and *tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me*. CEV

Ostracism and expulsion

Luke 6:22 Blessed are you when people hate you, and when *they exclude you and insult you and reject you as evil on account of the Son of Man!* NET

Acts 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, *raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region*. NKJV

Imprisonment

Acts 8:3 But Saul was trying to destroy the church; entering one house after another, *he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison*. NET

Beatings and violence

Acts 22:19 [PAUL:] I replied, 'Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and *beat those in the various synagogues who believed in you*. NET

Heb 11:35b But *others were tortured*, not accepting release, to obtain resurrection to a better life. NET

Threat of death . . .

Acts 9:1 Meanwhile *Saul, still breathing out threats to murder the Lord's disciples*, went to the high priest ... NET

. . . and even death

Acts 22:4a [PAUL:] I made trouble for everyone who followed the Lord's Way, and *I even had some of them killed*. CEV

c) The Antichrist and the Final Persecution

The Bible speaks of a figure of the end times that is opposed to God and Jesus Christ, and persecutes their people – a final "antichrist". The first "beast" in Revelation is correlated by many with such a figure. However others consider it and the second beast that supports it to represent evil world systems rather than individual persons.

Scripture speaks of the coming of an antichrist

2Thes 2:3b Then *before the Lord returns, the wicked one who is doomed to be destroyed will appear*. CEV

1Jn 2:18 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that *the antichrist is coming*, so now many antichrists have appeared. We know from this that it is the last hour. NET

The final antichrist will be preceded by many others who are anti-Christ – "now many antichrists have appeared". False teachers could be primarily in view, but the designation is applicable at least to some degree to anyone who actively denies that Jesus is the Christ.

The antichrist will be of Satan and opposed to God

2Thes 2:9–10 *The arrival of the lawless one will be by Satan's working with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders,* [10]*and with every kind of evil deception* directed against those who are perishing, because they found no place in their hearts for the truth so as to be saved. NET

Dan 11:36a And the king shall do as he wills. *He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods.* ESV

Here "the king" is understood by many to represent the antichrist, as with "the lawless one" in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 above.

The antichrist will have great authority and be worshiped

Rev 13:7b–8 *He* [the beast] *was given ruling authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation,* [8]*and all those who live on the earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life* belonging to the Lamb who was killed. NET

Persecution of God's people will increase in the end times – especially due to the antichrist . . .

Matt 24:9 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name.* NET

Rev 13:7a *The beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them.* NET

. . . Martyrdom will be prominent

Rev 13:15 The second beast was empowered to give life to the image of the first beast so that it could speak, and could *cause all those who did not worship the image of the beast to be killed*. NET

"Three and a half years" is given for the rule of the antichrist and intense persecution

Dan 7:25 *He will speak against the Supreme God and oppress God's people.* He will try to change their religious laws and festivals, and *God's people will be under his power for three and a half years.* GNT

> In regard to the duration of the antichrist's rule and the future period of intense persecution of believers, the Bible speaks of periods of time which are equivalent to three and a half years. Whether or not this is a literal three and half years, such specifications are indicative of the period being predetermined by God.

The end of the antichrist

Rev 19:19–20 [John, describing a vision:] *Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to do battle with the one who rode the horse and with his army.* [20]*Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf* – signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. *Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur.* NET

> In v. 19, "the one who rode the horse" is Jesus Christ, returning with his army of angels.

The outcome of submitting to the antichrist

Rev 14:9–11 [John, describing a vision:] A third angel followed the first two, declaring in a loud voice: *"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and takes the mark* [of the beast] *on his forehead or his hand,* [10]*that person will also drink of the wine of God's anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur in front of the holy angels and in front of the Lamb.* [11]*And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night, along with anyone who receives the mark of his name."* NET

d) God's Care of Persecuted Believers

God's all-surpassing purpose, work and love for his people – despite adversity

Rom 8:28–31, 35–39 [Paul, to believers:] And *we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose,* [29]*because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.* [30]*And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.* [31]*What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? …* [35]*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* [36]As it is written, "For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." [37]*No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!* [38]*For*

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, [39]*nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* NET

The phrase "all things" (v. 28) probably primarily has in view adverse experiences, in particular persecution (cf. v. 18). In vv. 29–30 Paul proceeds to look beyond any suffering to the purpose and work of God for the believer that overshadows all difficulties we might experience in this life. Verse 31 is implying that if God is for us – as is emphatically shown (vv. 28–30) – there is no one (and no thing) of comparable significance that can be against us.

God and Jesus Christ strengthen their people amidst trials

2Tim 1:8b [Paul, to Timothy:] Instead, *take your part in suffering for the Good News, as God gives you the strength to do it.* GNT

2Cor 12:9b–10 [Christ, to Paul:] *"My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* [Paul:] *So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.* [10]*Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.* NET

In weakness, hardship and/or persecution (v. 10a) Christ's power was perfected in Paul (v. 9). As such Paul could then say: "I am strong" (v. 10b).

God and Jesus Christ will rescue their people from trials . . .

Jer 15:20–21 [God, to Jeremiah:] I will make you as strong as a wall to these people, a fortified wall of bronze. *They will attack you, but they will not be able to overcome you. For I will be with you to rescue you and deliver you," says the Lord.* [21]*"I will deliver you from the power of the wicked. I will free you from the clutches of violent people."* NET

2Tim 4:18 [Paul:] *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* Glory belongs to him forever and ever! Amen. ISV

In light of vv. 6–8, which indicate that his death was near, it appears that Paul is not referring here to a physical rescue but a spiritual one – where Christ would bring him "safely to his heavenly kingdom".

. . . as indeed they have rescued believers in the past

Dan 3:28 The king said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! *He sent his angel and rescued these men who serve and trust him.* They disobeyed my orders and risked their lives rather than bow down and worship any god except their own. GNT

2Tim 3:11b [Paul:] *I endured these persecutions and the Lord delivered me from them all.* NET

God will ultimately save believers from the persecution of the end times

Dan 7:21–22 [Daniel, describing a vision:] While I was watching, *that horn began to wage war against the holy ones and was defeating them,* [22]*until the Ancient of Days arrived and judgment was rendered in favor of the holy ones of the Most High. Then the time came for the holy ones to take possession of the kingdom.* NET

The "horn" is understood by many to represent the antichrist.

Note: God will take vengeance on those who persecute his people

2Thes 1:6–7 [Paul, to believers:] *God will do what is right: he will bring suffering on those who make you suffer,* [7]*and he will give relief to you who suffer and to us as well. He will do this when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven with his mighty angels, ...* GNT

Rev 6:9–11 [John, describing a vision:] Now when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been violently killed because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given. [10]They cried out with a loud voice, *"How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?"* [11]Each of them was given a long white robe and *they were told to rest for a little longer,* until the full number was reached of both their fellow servants and their brothers who were going to be killed just as they had been. NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. What to Do in Persecution

The Bible provides practical teaching on what to do when faced with persecution. Moreover, the Bible even provides good reasons to rejoice in spite of the suffering often involved in persecution. Not least of these reasons are the blessings that we can experience amidst such hardship – and those that we will receive in the future for enduring it.

a) Be Faithful to God and Endure

Remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ

Rev 2:10, 13 [Jesus Christ, to the church in Pergamum:] Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. *Remain faithful even to the point of death*, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. ... [13]'I know where you live – where Satan's throne is. *Yet you continue to cling to my name and you have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your city where Satan lives.* NET

The clause "where Satan's throne is" (v. 13a) apparently refers to the city of Pergamum as a center of pagan worship, no doubt a hostile place to Christians. Note Antipas's example (v. 13b) of being faithful "even to the point of death" (v. 10b).

Continue to do what God wants

1Pet 4:19 [Peter, to believers:] Those who suffer because that is God's will for them must entrust themselves to a faithful creator and *continue to do what is good*. GW

Endure persecution and suffering

1Cor 4:12b [Paul:] *When people persecute us, we endure it.* GW

Rev 13:10 [John:] Whoever is meant to be captured will surely be captured; whoever is meant to be killed by the sword will surely be killed by the sword. *This calls for endurance* and faith on the part of God's people. GNT

Endure persecution and suffering patiently

Rev 2:3 [Jesus Christ, to the church in Ephesus:] I know *you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary*. ESV

Consider and follow Jesus Christ's example in suffering . . .

Heb 12:2–3 *Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross*, and he is now seated at the right-hand side of God's throne. [3]*Think of what he went through; how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up.* GNT

. . . and share in Jesus Christ's sufferings

1Pet 4:13 [Peter, to believers:] But be happy that *you are sharing in Christ's sufferings* so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory. NCV™

It was necessary for Christ to suffer in order to achieve God's objectives for him. Likewise those who are "in" him, being a part of his body (the church), must also be prepared to suffer in order to advance his cause. Quite possibly the NT writers had such a concept in mind when they wrote of sharing in Christ's sufferings.

Note: Be on your guard against persecutors and avoid persecution when appropriate

Matt 10:16–17 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *I am sending you out like sheep surrounded by wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.* [17]*Beware of people, because they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.* NET

Matt 10:23a [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Whenever they persecute you in one place, flee to another.* NET

We are to be faithful to God in what we do even if it means that we will draw persecution. Having said this, verses such as this one suggest that it is appropriate to avoid persecution when doing so does not involve being unfaithful. Verses 16–17 above also suggest this.

b) Have Faith in God and Pray

Have faith and hope in God . . .

Dan 3:17, 28 [Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to King Nebuchadnezzar:] Your majesty, if it be his will, *our God whom we serve can deliver us from the blazing fire furnace, and he will deliver us from you.* ... [28]Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said: 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! *He sent his angel to deliver his servants who trusted in him.* They disobeyed the king's command and were willing to risk their lives in order not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ISV

2Cor 1:8–11 [Paul:] For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. [9]Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But *that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead*. [10]He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. *On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.* ESV

. . . Faith and hope enable one to endure persecution and suffering

1Thes 1:3b [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] And we thank him [God] that *you continue to be strong because of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* NCV™

2Thes 1:4 [Paul, to the Thessalonian believers:] That's why we brag in God's churches about *your endurance and faith in all the persecutions and suffering you are experiencing*. GW

> The coupling of "endurance and faith" suggests that faith goes hand in hand with endurance.

Do not be afraid of persecutors or suffering

Matt 10:28–31 [Jesus, to his disciples:] *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.* Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. [29]*Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.* [30]*Even all the hairs on your head are numbered.* [31]*So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.* NET

Rev 2:10 [Jesus Christ, to the church in Ephesus:] *Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer.* The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. NET

Do not worry about what to say – you will be given what to say

Matt 10:18–20 [Jesus, to his disciples:] You will be brought before governors and kings because of me, to testify to them and to the gentiles. [19]When they hand you over, *don't worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, because in that hour what you are to say will be given to you.* [20]*It won't be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* ISV

Pray to God, asking for help

Acts 4:29–30 [The early believers:] And *now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,* [30]*while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.* NET

> Note that the believers' prayer was for God to work through them amidst persecution, rather than simply for God to stop the persecution.

Bless and pray for those who persecute you

Matt 5:44–45 But I say to you, Love your enemies and *pray for those who persecute you,* [45]*so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ESV

1Cor 4:12b [Paul:] *When we are verbally abused, we respond with a blessing*, when persecuted, we endure, ... NET

c) Rejoice

Rejoice because trials develop Christian character and virtues

Rom 5:3–4 [Paul:] Not only this, but *we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* [4]*and endurance, character, and character, hope.* NET

James 1:2–4 My brothers and sisters, *consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials,* [3]*because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* [4]*And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything.* NET

Rejoice because of rewards for suffering and enduring persecution . . .

Luke 6:22–23 *Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you and insult you and reject you as evil on account of the Son of Man!* [23]*Rejoice in that day, and jump for joy, because your reward is great in heaven.* For their ancestors did the same things to the prophets. NET

. . . and look forward to these rewards

2Cor 4:17–18 [Paul:] And *this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble.* [18]*For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen.* What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts for ever. GNT

Other reasons to rejoice in persecution and difficulties

Acts 5:40–41 After calling in the apostles and beating them, they ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus and let them go. [41]They left the Council, *rejoicing to have been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the Name.* ESV

> The apostles rejoiced in part because they considered it to be an honor to suffer for "the name" of Jesus Christ (cf. NCV, NIrV; 1Pet 4:16). Furthermore, being "considered worthy" by God and/or Jesus Christ is indicative of being accepted by them – a thought that the apostles may have also had in mind.

1Pet 1:3–6 [Peter, to believers:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! *By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* [4]*that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you,* [5]*who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* [6]*This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials.* NET

> "This" (v. 6) certainly refers to the contents of vv. 3b–4; that which is in v. 5 may also be encompassed. These things give great reason for joy – and so to rejoice – even during suffering in trials (v. 6).

Further examples of rejoicing during persecution and difficulties

2Cor 6:10a [Paul:] *We have much sadness, but we are always rejoicing.* NCV™

2Cor 8:2 [Paul, speaking of the Macedonian churches:] *In spite of a terrible ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy,* along with their deep poverty, has resulted in the abundance of their generosity. ISV

d) Epilogue: Blessings for Faithfulness in Persecution

See also:

- *R*, p. 439

Blessings amidst suffering

2Cor 1:3–5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. [4]*He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us.* [5]*We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ.* NCV™

2Cor 4:11 *Throughout our lives we are always in danger of death for Jesus' sake, in order that his life may be seen in this mortal body of ours.* GNT

Jesus' "life" refers to his resurrection life – with its spiritual power for those who share in his suffering, suffering on his behalf.

God's kingdom

Matt 5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.* NET

Note that this teaching probably has both a present and a future application.

Eternal life

Luke 21:19 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *By your endurance you will gain your lives.* NET

James 1:12 *Happy are those who remain faithful under trials, because when they succeed in passing such a test, they will receive as their reward the life which God has promised to those who love him.* GNT

Future glory

Rom 8:17–18 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And if [we are] children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – *if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.* [18]*For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us.* NET

Other blessings in the afterlife . . .

Rev 7:14b–17 [A HEAVENLY ELDER, EXPLAINING TO JOHN WHO WERE THE PEOPLE WEARING WHITE ROBES IN JOHN'S VISION:] *"These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!* [15]*For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them.* [16]*They will never go hungry or be thirsty again, and the sun will not beat down on them, nor any burning heat,* [17]*because the Lamb in the middle of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* NET

. . . Blessings for one "who conquers"

Rev 3:4–5 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS:] But *you have a few individuals in Sardis who have not stained their clothes, and they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy.* [5]*The one who conquers will be dressed like them in white clothing, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will declare his name before my Father and before his angels.* NET

Being dressed in white (vv. 4b–5a) signifies purity and quite possibly also the glorified state of the righteous.

Rev 21:7 [GOD:] *The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son.* NET

The believer who conquers or overcomes all the opposition and difficulties they face in striving to be faithful to God, will inherit all the blessings of the new Jerusalem (cf. vv. 1–6).

Pray for persecuted Christians

Reference Sections

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Unit D. God and His Own People

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b) God's Glory
c) God's Personhood
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I ▽

a) Prologue: The Precedence of Godly Wisdom
b) Wisdom through God
c) Wisdom through Others
d) Wise Speech (I): Instructions
e) Wise Speech (II): Insights
f) Wise Personal Practices

I ▽

a) Foolishness
b) Foolish and Ungodly Practices
c) Spiritual Ignorance (I): Causes and Results
d) Spiritual Ignorance (II): Knowledge Lacked
e) Epilogue: Blessings of Wisdom

34. Common Relationships

I ▽

a) Prologue: Getting Married
b) Spouses (I): General
c) Spouses (II): Romantic Love
d) Parents' Duties to Children (I): Love and Care
e) Parents' Duties to Children (II): Godly Training
f) Children's Duties to Parents

I ▽

a) Citizens' Duties to Authorities
b) Authorities' Duties to Citizens (I): General
c) Authorities' Duties to Citizens (II): Justice
d) Servants and Masters

35. Spreading the Gospel

I ▽

a) Tell People the Gospel
b) What Things to Explain
c) How to Spread the Message
d) Supplementary Actions

I ▽

a) Insights on the Gospel Message
b) The Need to Spread the Gospel
c) God and the Gospel's Effectiveness
d) Further Insights regarding the Gospel

Unit H. Persevering

36. Standing Firm

I ▽

a) Be Faithful to God
b) Remember God and His Word
c) Hold to the Faith
d) Persist until the End
e) Be Ready for Jesus Christ's Return

I ▽

a) The Existence of Spiritual Warfare
b) Engaging in Spiritual Warfare
c) Counteraction of Demons
d) Ungodly Spiritualistic Practices

37. Rejecting Sin

I ▽

a) Consequences of Sin for God's People
b) Addressing Sin (I): Return from Sin to God
c) Addressing Sin (II): Deal with Sin before God
d) God's Response to Repentance

I ▽

a) Avoiding Sin
b) Alternatives to Sin
c) Be Holy (I): General
d) Be Holy (II): Being Set Apart

38. Major Pitfalls

I ▽

a) Pride in Thought
b) Pride in Action: Self-Exaltation and Boasting
c) Outcomes of Pride
d) Antithesis of Pride: Humility

I ▽

a) Riches and Godliness
b) Further Warnings about Riches
c) Sexual Sin
d) Prohibited Forms of Sex
e) Epilogue: Be Wary

39. Hard Times

I ▽

a) Prologue: God's People Still Have Hard Times
b) Mourn Loss
c) Keep in Mind God and His Word
d) Trust in God
e) Hope in God and Wait for Him

I ▽

a) Express Your Anguish to God
b) Ask God for Help (I): General
c) Ask God for Help (II): Things to Appeal To
d) Praise and Rejoice in God
e) Epilogue: God Does Respond to Suffering and Cries

40. Persecution

I ▽

a) God's People Face Persecution
b) Types of Persecution
c) The Antichrist and the Final Persecution
d) God's Care of Persecuted Believers

I ▽

a) Be Faithful to God and Endure
b) Have Faith in God and Pray
c) Rejoice
d) Epilogue: Blessings for Faithfulness in Persecution

All Headings

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1. God's Being
2. God's Character
3. Jesus Christ
4. The Holy Spirit
5. Angels, Satan and Demons

6. God's Creation
7. God's Sovereignty
8. God's Word
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10. God's Judgment

11. God's Promised Messiah
12. Jesus Christ's Mission
13. Salvation through Jesus Christ
14. The New Order
15. 'The Last Things'

16. The Standing of God's People
17. Keys to God's Interaction
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19. God's Care of His People
20. God's Plans for His People

21. Being Right with God
22. Having Faith in God
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29. Significant Practices
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31. Love
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33. Wisdom
34. Common Relationships
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36. Standing Firm
37. Rejecting Sin
38. Major Pitfalls
39. Hard Times
40. Persecution

1. God’s Being △

I. Basics △

a) God’s Form

- G
- G
- G
- G
- A vision of God
- N

b) God’s Glory

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

c) God’s Personhood

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- .
- G

d) God’s Eternity

- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G

II. God’s Pre-Eminence △

a) God’s Greatness

- G
- G
- G
- T
- .
- G

b) God’s Power (I): Ultimate Power

- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- .
- P

c) God’s Power (II): His Deeds

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

d) God’s Knowledge and Wisdom

- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .
- N

e) Addendum: God’s ‘Name’

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

2. God’s Character △

I. Holy Characteristics △

a) Holiness

- G
- T
- T
- G
- P
- .
- T
- N

b) Righteousness and Justice

- G
- G
- G
- A
- .
- G
- G
- N

c) Faithfulness

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

d) Anger

- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- O

II. Loving Characteristics △

a) Love

- G
- G
- G
- G

b) Mercy

- G
- G
- A
- G
- D
- .
- N

c) Benevolence

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .

d) Jealousy

- G
- G
- G
- G
- .
- N

3. Jesus Christ △

I. General △

a) Jesus Christ's Eternity

- J
- J
- .
- J
- J
- J

b) Jesus Christ's Pre-Eminence

- J
- J
- J
- A
- J
- J
- J

c) Jesus Christ's Character

- J
- J
- .
- J
- J
- J
- .
- J

d) Jesus Christ's 'Name'

- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- N

II. Jesus Christ and God △

a) Jesus Christ Is the Son of God (I): General

- J
- .
- G
- J
- J
- N

b) Jesus Christ Is the Son of God (II): Testimony

- G
- J
- O
- J
- O

c) Jesus Christ Is Identified with God

- J
- T
- J
- . . . and Jesus' usage of "I am" quite possibly alludes to God's name
- O
- S
- N

d) Jesus Christ Is Treated like God Is

- J
- J
- P
- P
- P
- P

e) Jesus Christ Is Under God's Authority

- J
- G
- J
- J
- G

4. The Holy Spirit △

I. General △

a) The Holy Spirit of God

- T
- .
- T
- T
- G

b) The Holy Spirit's Being

- T
- T
- T
- .
- T
- .
- T

c) The Holy Spirit's Personhood

- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- .
- N
-

II. God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit △

a) Mutual Association

- G
- T
- .
- T
- G
- .

b) Mutual Divine Attributes

- O
- O
- O
- D
- E
- H

c) Mutual Divine Roles

- G
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T

5. Angels, Satan and Demons △

I. Angels △

a) Attributes of Angels

- A
- A
- A
- A
- A
- A
- A
- A
- F

b) Angels and God

- A
- A
- A
- .
- A

c) Angels and God's People

- A
- E
- A
- A
- N

d) Further Teaching about Angels

- A
- A
- T
- T
- A

II. Satan and Demons △

a) Satan’s Evilness

- S
- S
- S
- .
- N

b) Satan’s Power

- S
- S
- S
- S
- .
- N

c) Satan’s Work against God’s People

- S
- S
- .
- S
- S
- S

d) Demons

- D
- D
- D
- D
- .
- D
- D

6. God’s Creation △

I. General △

a) God Made All Things

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

b) God Maintains Creation

- E
- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

c) How God Made and Maintains Creation

- G
- G
- G
- G
- T
- O

d) Implications of God Being Creator

- G
- A
- A
- C
- C
- C

II. God’s Creation of People △

a) Life and Death

- G
- G
- G
- P
- E
- .
- O
- N

b) The Human Spirit

- G
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- P
- P

c) The Uniqueness of People

- G
- P
- P
- .
- P
- G
- P
- P

d) Epilogue: God’s Self-Revelation to People

- P
- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- N

7. God’s Sovereignty △

I. God’s Supreme Authority △

a) The Lord Is God – the Only God

- T
- T
- T
- T
- .
- G

b) God Reigns Supreme

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

c) God Has Power over All Things

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- .
- G

d) God Defeats His Enemies

- N
- .
- G
- G
- G

e) God Fulfills His Plans

- G
- G
- W
- G
- .
- N
- .
- G

II. God’s Control over the World △

a) God Has Control over Evil

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

b) God Has Control over Nature

- G
- N
- G
- .
- G
- G

c) God Has Control over the Nations

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .

d) God Has Control over Each Person

- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- .
- N

e) Addendum: God’s Early Dealings with Humankind

- G
- H
- .
- T
- T

8. God’s Word △

I. General △

a) What God’s Word Comprises

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

b) God’s Communication of His Word

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

c) Characteristics of God’s Word

- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- N

d) Functions of God’s Word (I): General

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

e) Functions of God’s Word (II): Blessings

- L
- .
- L
- K
- W
- H
- J
- F
- N

II. Key Old Testament Covenants △

a) God’s Covenant with Abraham

- G
- S
- .
- A
- G

b) God’s Making of Israel as His People

- G
- .
- G
- G
- N

c) God’s Covenant with Israel and the Law

- G
- .
- T
- B
- B
- I

d) The Ark of the Covenant and God’s Presence

- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- .
- C

e) God’s Faithfulness to His Covenant with Israel

- G
- G
- C
- G
- S

f) God’s Dealings and Covenant with David

- D
- D
- G
- N

9. The Problem of Sin △

I. General △

a) What Sin Is

- S
- E
- D
- A
- N

b) Sin Is against God

- S
- E
- S
- F
- .
- S
- G

c) Sin Is Universal

- A
- N
- P
- .
- P
- .
- N
- .

d) Sin’s Intrinsic Ill Effects

- S
- S
- .
- S
- .
- E
- F

e) Sin Brings God’s Judgment – Ultimately Death

- W
- S
- G
- S
- S

II. The Law’s Provision for Israel’s Sin △

a) Offerings for Atonement for Sinners

- T
- T
- .
- .
- A

b) Aspects of Making Offerings for Sin

- A
- A
- T
- T
- .

c) The Role of the Priests

- G
- T
- T
- T
- T

d) Ceremonial Cleanness

- B
- U
- C
- U
- W
- C
- U
- N

e) Epilogue: Israel’s Persistence in Sin

- I
- I
- S
- .
- S
- .

10. God’s Judgment △

I. Basics △

a) God Is the Judge of the World

- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

b) Reasons for God’s Judgment

- T
- T
- T
- .
- T
- T
- T
- N

c) God’s Judgment Is Just

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .

d) God’s Judgment Reveals God

- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- N

II. The Manifestation of God’s Judgment △

a) Means of God’s Judicial Retribution

- A
- N
- R
- .
- G

b) Characteristics of God’s Judicial Retribution

- A
- .
- I
- T
- .
- H
- .

c) The Wicked and God’s Pending Judgment

- T
- G
- Q
- H
- G
- I
- .
- G
- N

d) Repayments for the Wicked and the Righteous

- T
- I
- G
- G
- T
- .

e) Epilogue: God’s Judgment of Israel – and His Mercy

- M
- E
- T
- G
- B
- G
- J
- N

11. God’s Promised Messiah △

I. The Messiah’s Identity △

a) The Promise of a Messiah in OT Scripture

- T
- .
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T

b) Jesus Is the Promised Messiah

- J
- J
- .
- T
- F
- .

c) Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

- P
- P
- P
- P

d) Further Testimony to Jesus Being the Messiah

- J
- J
- J
- .
- O
- N

II. The Messiah’s Purpose and Person △

a) Jesus Christ’s Mission from God

- G
- G
- .
- J
- .
- J
- J
- F
- N

b) Jesus Christ’s Humanity

- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- .
- L
- N

c) Jesus Christ’s Personality

- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- J
- N

d) Epilogue: God Works through Jesus Christ

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G

12. Jesus Christ's Mission △

I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ △

a) Jesus Christ's Authority from God

- G
- J
- J
- J
- J

b) Jesus Christ's Power from God

- G
- T
- J
- J
- J
- J

c) Jesus Christ's Knowledge from God

- G
- J
- J
- .
- J
- J
- .
- N

d) Jesus Christ's Direction from God

- G
- J
- .
- J
- J
- .
- J

II. Ministry, Death and Resurrection △

a) Jesus Christ's Miracles

- J
- J
- J
- J
- J

b) Jesus Christ's Teaching

- J
- .
- J
- J
- J
- .
- J
- .

c) Jesus Christ's Rejection and Death

- J
- J
- J
- J
- T
- T
- J
- .
- I

d) Jesus Christ's Resurrection and Ascension

- G
- J
- J
- J
- J
- B

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ △

I. Salvation from Sin △

a) Jesus Christ's Death as an Offering for Sin

- G
- J
- .
- J
- J
- I

b) Jesus Christ's Death and Atonement for Sin

- J
- J
- .
- S
- .
- T

c) Jesus Christ's Death and Redemption from Sin

- J
- G
- .
- J
- .
- N
- .

d) Jesus Christ's Resurrection and Salvation

- J
- J
- .
- J
- J
- N

II. Salvation for the World △

a) The Savior of the World

- G
- J
- .
- W
- J

b) Life through Jesus Christ

- G
- J
- J
- T
- J

c) Salvation for the Gentiles through Jesus Christ

- G
- G
- .
- G
- G

d) The Gentiles as Part of God’s People

- G
- J
- G
- T
- .

e) Epilogue: Jesus Christ’s Mission and Israel

- J
- .
- B
- .
- T
- G
- .
- B
- D

14. The New Order △

I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role △

a) Righteousness Not by Law, but Faith in Jesus Christ

- T
- .
- P
- .
- B
- O

b) Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ

- G
- G
- P
- P
- .
- E

c) Release from the Law through Jesus Christ

- J
- S
- W
- T
- I

d) The Relevance of the Law

- T
- .
- T
- T
- T

II. Key Elements of the New Order △

a) God’s New Covenant

- T
- .
- J
- T
- T
- .
- U

b) Jesus Christ as High Priest

- J
- J
- P
- .
- A
- J

c) The Kingdom of God

- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- N

d) Jesus Christ as Lord of All

- F
- .
- G
- G
- J
- J
- I

15. ‘The Last Things’ △

I. Jesus Christ’s Return and the Judgment △

a) Prologue: Judgments Preceding Jesus Christ’s Return

- E
- E
- E

b) The Timing of Jesus Christ’s Return

- G
- J
- J
- A
- J

c) Jesus Christ’s Return

- J
- J
- B
- O
- O

d) The Final Judgment (I): Its Scope and Outcomes

- G
- T
- .
- E
- G

e) The Final Judgment (II): The Process

- G
- O
- T
- T
- W

f) Jesus Christ’s Universal Rule

- P
- G
- T
- A
- A
- A
- G

II. The Afterlife △

a) The New Creation

- T
- .
- G
- G
- G
- N

b) Eternal Life

- A
- O
- G
- E
- .
- G
- G

c) The Heavenly State of God’s People

- G
- .
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- .
- N

d) Being with God

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .

e) The Punishment for the Ungodly

- T
- .
- T
- T
- T
- T
- N

16. The Standing of God’s People △

I. Basics △

a) Prologue: God Draws People to Himself

- G
- .
- G
- G
- N

b) God’s People Belong to God

- G
- T
- .
- G
- G
- .

c) God’s People Are His Family

- E
- G
- T
- A
- G
- G

d) God’s People Are His Church

- G
- J
- T
- .

II. Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ △

a) God’s People Are ‘in’ Jesus Christ

- G
- T
- J
- G
- .

b) The Significance of Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ

- “
- “
- “
- “
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- “
- “
- “

c) God’s People Are One Body ‘in’ Jesus Christ

- A
- .
- G
- T
- .
- J
- J

d) Epilogue: God’s People Relate to God through Jesus Christ

- J
- G
- G
- G

17. Keys to God's Interaction △

I. Basics △

a) God Is Always with His People

- G
- G
- .
- G
- .
- G
- B
- G
- G

b) God Knows His People and They Know Him

- G
- G
- G
- S
- .
- G
- G

c) God Loves His People

- G
- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- J
- N

d) God Is Faithful to His People

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

e) God Shows Grace to His People

- G
- B
- B
- .
- B
- B

II. God’s Holy Spirit in His People △

a) God Gives the Holy Spirit to His People

- G
- .
- T
- H
- .
- T

b) God Works in His People through the Holy Spirit

- G
- G
- G
- .
- J
- T
- .

c) The Holy Spirit Renews God’s People

- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- .
- H

d) The Holy Spirit Helps God’s People

- T
- T
- T
- T
- T
- G

18. God’s Transformation of His People △

I. General △

a) God Makes His People Spiritually Alive

- G
- T
- I
- G
- .
- G

b) God Makes His People Holy

- G
- .
- G
- G
- .
- N

c) God Teaches His People

- G
- G
- G
- G
- .
- G

d) God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons

- W
- .
- G
- G
- H
- G
- F

e) God Disciplines His People (II): Insights

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- .
- G

II. Spiritual Attributes △

a) Love, Faith and Hope

- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .

b) Peace

- G
- G
- J
- .
- G
- G
- N

c) Joy

- G
- G
- T
- P
- N

d) Wisdom and Knowledge

- G
- G
- G
- .
- N

19. God’s Care of His People △

I. God’s Saving of His People △

a) God’s Capacity to Save His People

- G
- G
- .
- G
- N

b) God Saves His People – from All Things

- G
- G
- G
- O
- N
- .

c) God Redeems His People

- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- N

d) God Helps His People against Enemies

- G
- G
- G
- G
- F
- G
- G

e) God Is Revealed in Saving His People

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G

II. God’s Preservation of His People △

a) God Meets His People’s Needs

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- N

b) God Strengthens His People

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- .

c) God Protects His People (I): General

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- G

d) God Protects His People (II): Depictions

- G
- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- .

e) Epilogue: God’s Care of the Needy

- T
- H
- G
- G
- G

20. God’s Plans for His People △

I. General △

a) God Has Plans and Purposes for His People

- G
- G
- G
- I
- G
- .
- N

b) God Works through His People (I): General

- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- .
- G
- G

c) God Works through His People (II): Empowerment

- G
- G
- G
- G
- .
- G
- N

d) God Guides His People

- G
- .
- G
- G
- G
- E

II. God’s Plans for Israel △

a) Return to the Land

- G
- G
- .
- T
- J

b) Physical Renewal

- I
-
- I
- J
- .

c) Deliverance and Everlasting Peace

- G
- G
- S
- I
- I
- G
- T
- I

d) Spiritual Renewal

- G
- .
- I
- I
- T
- T

e) A Renewed Relationship with God

- I
- I
- I
- G
- T
- G

f) Exaltation and Glorification

- I
- T
- .
- G
- G
- I
- I

21. Being Right with God △

I. Getting Right with God △

a) God's Invitation

- G
- .
- G
- W
- W
- N

b) Repentance

- W
- C
- .
- I
- .
- R
- R
- N

c) Belief in Jesus Christ (I): General

- B
- B
- urther key things to know and believe about Jesus Christ
- ne's response to Jesus Christ is one's response to God, who sent him
- S
- . . We are to both believe and repent

d) Belief in Jesus Christ (II): Reasons to Believe

- Jesus Christ's words and knowledge
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- Jesus Christ's death and resurrection
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- . . God himself testified to Jesus and his claims

e) Belief in Jesus Christ (III): Outcomes

- W
- W
- W
- W
- W
- W
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f) Reasons for Assurance

- G
- J
- H
- O
- L
- F

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a) The Need to Obey God

- O
- O
- O
- O
- .
- O
- O
- N

b) The Need for Good Deeds

- W
- T
- G
- N

c) Living Free of the Law and Sin – by the Spirit

- O
- .
- W
- I
- .
- N

d) Epilogue: Living ‘in’ Jesus Christ

- L
- R
- W
- .
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22. Having Faith in God △

I. Faith and Hope △

a) Have Faith in God

- H
- L
- G
- H
- .
- P
- R
- .
- .

b) What Faith in God Involves Doing

- T
- .
- H
- H
- H
- N

c) The Importance of Faith (I): Godly Living

- B
- F
- F
- F
- I

d) The Importance of Faith (II): Blessings

- B
- B
- .
- B
- T

e) Have Hope in God

- P
- P
- S
- S
- R
- .
- O

f) The Importance of Hope

- H
- H
- F
- N

II. What Not to Do △

a) Do Not Lack Faith

- D
- .
- D
- L
- L
- L

b) Do Not Be Afraid (I): Instructions

- D
- D
- D
- D
- .
- D

c) Do Not Be Afraid (II): Reasons

- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- G
- F
- N

d) Do Not Worry

- D
- .
- D
- T

e) Do Not Trust in Other Things

- D
- .
- D
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- D

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I. Loving and Fearing God △

a) Love God

- L
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- L
- L
- L

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- L
- G
- G
- V
- B

c) Fear God

- F
- F
- .
- D
- N

d) Why God Should Be Feared

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- .
- G
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- G
- G

e) The Importance of Fearing God (I): Godly Living

- F
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- F
- F
- N

f) The Importance of Fearing God (II): Blessings

- G
- F
- F
- F
- F

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- K
- O
- O
- D
- .
- O
- W
- .
- W
- .

b) Learn God's Commands – and All His Word

- L
- A
- P
- L
- L
- P
- A
- N

c) How to Obey God

- D
- .
- A
- S
- O
- R
- B
- N

d) Blessings of Obeying God

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- G
- G
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e) Epilogue: Follow Jesus Christ

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- F
- F
- M
- .
- B

24. Connecting with God △

I. Being Close to God △

a) Seek God

- S
- S
- S
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- N
- N

b) Focus on God

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- K
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- .
- F

c) Meet with God and Live before Him

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- .
- C
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- W

b) Praying before God

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- P
- P

c) Physical Aspects of Prayer

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- P
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25. Exalting God △

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a) Glorify and Honor God

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- H
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b) Do Not Dishonor God

- D
- D
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- D
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- .
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- G
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- T
- A
- C
- T

b) Be in Unison

- B
- L
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- A
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- N

c) Be in Fellowship

- H
- .
- P
- S
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- S
- K
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d) Love Each Other (I): General

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- L
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- L
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- K
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- A

c) Encourage Each Other

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- E
- E
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- .
- C
- C

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- F
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- F
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- W
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- L
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- L
- .
- L

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- B
- L
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- P
- G

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- .
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- .
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- .
- S
- .

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- .

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- G
- D
- .
- D

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- D
- D
- D
- D

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- D
- D

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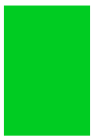
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Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk
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Open Doors – www.opendoors.org
Open Doors provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc
RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See www.idop.org regarding the International Day of Prayer.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com
This site provides weekly prayer bulletins.

The Bible League – bl.org.au/get-involved/bibles-for-the-persecuted**;** bl.org.au
The Bible League provides Bibles for persecuted Christians, as well as other under-resourced churches. It also trains national believers to plant new churches in countries of persecution.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com
VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org
World Watch Monitor reports the story of Christians around the world under pressure for their faith.

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Matthew 25:40

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